

FAQ ON YOGA

"Shiva (The Supreme Principle of Goodness) is the Highest Truth and Yoga is the Path that leads to Him".

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TEACHINGS AND PRACTICE

The Light of Consciousness

YOGA is the Light that removes the veil of limited and flawed knowledge from man's eyes that he may see the Truth. Just as dawn is the light that dispels the darkness of night, so Truth is the light that dispels the darkness of nescience or ignorance.

Truth and Light are identical in their function of revealing reality. For this reason, in Yoga, the word **Light (Prakasha)** has a very special significance.

God, the Supreme Being, Himself is known as **The Great Light (Mahaprakasha), Infinite Light (Anantaprakasha), Amitabha (Boundless Radiance)**, etc.

In particular, **Light** stands for that power whereby living beings from the smallest to the Supreme, perceive, know or understand, that is to say, the power of intelligence, knowledge, consciousness or Spirit.

The Yogis of Ancient India discovered the light of consciousness as the principle upon which all intelligent life depends: a discovery that the modern World only now begins to appreciate.

In the same way as our outer life depends on sunlight, our inner life depends on the light of consciousness. **Therefore, knowledge of Consciousness is the highest science.** Mankind is doomed to blunder about in the darkness of ignorance until the paramount importance of Consciousness is acknowledged by all.

Levels of Reality

As a non-physical force, Intelligence or **Consciousness (Samvid)** has its origin in the higher dimensions of existence.

In common with all true Spiritual traditions, Yoga teaches that there are various dimensions or levels of reality which are comparable to the Multiple Universes or Parallel Worlds of modern science. While Western scientists are only just beginning to explore the boundaries of the physical Universe, the higher dimensions of existence have been well-known to Enlightened Yogis from times immemorial.

Although there are as many dimensions as there are living Souls, they are usually divided into three basic Planes, Terrestrial, Astral and Celestial, according to the stages of experience to which they belong.

The Home of all Souls

The Higher Planes constitute **Shiva's World of Light**. In the same way as the Sun represents the Physical World's centre and source of light, Shiva's World of Light represents the Centre and Source of Light in the Spiritual World. Indeed, it is the Origin of everything that exists. It is the birthplace and true home of all Souls.

Souls are Light-Beings, that is, luminous entities, who originally led a happy and peaceful life within the infinite expanse of Shiva's Universal Consciousness. At a subsequent stage in the history of the Universe, it became necessary for some Souls to abandon their condition of unity and harmony with the Celestial Light World and descend to lower, less luminous planes of existence.

One such plane is Planet Earth where Souls acquire material bodies as a means of working out certain latent impulses or tendencies (**samskaras**). Close association with a physical body and distance from the

Universal Source Light leads these Souls to identify with the body and isolate themselves from their original non-material source. Thus they wander from life to life until they re-discover their true self and true home.

Yoga is the process of Harmonisation and Unification - the word Yoga literally means Unity - whereby embodied Souls are empowered to see clearly again and return to their natural state of Peace and Happiness by re-establishing a link with the Original Source of Light which is the Fountainhead of all Life and Supreme Well-Spring of Goodness.

Gods, Angels and Gurus: our Spiritual Friends

On their return journey to the Source, Souls are guided either directly by the Universal Consciousness (Shiva) Himself or by those Evolved Souls who have already attained a state of Unity with Him.

In the West, such beings are usually called Angels (Divine Messengers), an Eastern word which along with Paradise and other religious terms points to the Eastern origin of Western faiths. In the East they are called **Radiant Ones (Devas)**. In Yoga, they are also known as **Great Souls (Mahatmas)** or simply **Friends (Bandhu)**. Enlightened Yoga Masters (who are Masters of Universal Unity) belong to this class of beings who serve the function of assisting human Souls in finding happiness in earthly life and, on a higher level, elevating Humanity to Higher Spiritual dimensions.

Yoga: The Key to Happiness and Fulfilment

The practice of Yoga attracts the attention and protection of higher beings who guide the Seekers upon the Path.

This is another key teaching of Yoga, namely, that nobody is alone. The Universe is a Great Unity or Community of Souls helping, and interacting with, each other in many different ways.

However, no amount of help can make a difference unless and until man himself makes a personal effort to advance on the scale of existence. It is only by making a conscious effort that we can advance upon the Glorious Yoga Path to Unity with the Supreme.

One of the World's greatest scholars and celebrated founding father of Western Psychology, Professor Carl Gustav Jung, famously declared that Yoga offers undreamed-of possibilities. Indeed, Yoga enables man to attain the **Four Goals of Life (Chatur Varga)** which are: Material Prosperity (**Artha**), Fulfilment in Love (**Kama**), Righteousness (**Dharma**) and Spiritual Liberation (**Nirvana**).

As the Supreme Lord declares in His Eternal Revelation: "It is by the Power of Yoga, which is Unity with the Supreme, that man's material life is kept in order. It is by the Power of Yoga that man is united with his heart's desire. It is by the Power of Yoga that Righteousness is established in man's heart. It is by the Power of Yoga, too, that man is united with Me. Thus, Yoga or Unity (Samyoga) is the essence of all life" (Shiva Rahasya 5:54).

INTRODUCTION TO YOGA PRACTICE

The Conscious Cultivation of Positive Energy and Harmony

The practice of Yoga is based on energy (Shakti, in Sanskrit). Energy is a power or force that has the capacity to act or work by producing changes in itself and in other forces with which it comes into contact. In Spiritual terms, Energy is the power whereby intelligence, the conscious Soul, acts and interacts with the World.

Human life and all activities upon which it is based - e.g., breathing, feeling, thinking, perceiving - is nothing but a constant exchange of energies, inner and outer. Harmonious energy exchanges result in a harmonious, healthy and happy life. Lack of harmony results in conflict, imbalance and pain.

However, the play of energies that constitutes human life would be incomplete or even meaningless without reference to Intelligence or **Consciousness (Samvid)**. Consciousness is a higher force that has the capacity to act upon, influence and direct the activities of Energy. The state of our consciousness, therefore, is instrumental in determining the happiness and success (or unhappiness and failure) of our life. The Soul's natural state of peace and happiness can be disrupted either temporarily or more permanently - though never completely so - by a vitiated consciousness. That is to say, when Consciousness is contaminated by wrong knowledge, false beliefs, etc., our life goes wrong despite the best of our efforts.

The Three Defects (Tri-Mala)

The three main causes of Disharmony are the following **Three Defects** or **Taints (Tri-Mala)** of Consciousness: Spiritual Ignorance, Wrong Knowledge and Wrong Action. (1) **Spiritual Ignorance** or **Wrong Belief** is ignorance of a Higher Reality as the Ultimate Source of all things. (2) **Wrong Knowledge** is a Soul's illusory perception of himself as a limited and isolated physical body. (3) **Wrong Action** is all forms of activity, mental, verbal and physical, a human being engages in on the basis of the first two defects.

As a result of the Three Defects, man experiences Disharmony, Disunity, Separation and Conflict between himself and the Ultimate Life Source; between himself and his own Soul; and between himself and other Souls. Thus his life becomes a struggle to regain the original state of Harmony and Unity.

The Three Remedies (Tri-Ratna)

As the Spirituality of Absolute Harmony and Unity, Yoga teaches that life need not be a struggle. Indeed, life is designed to be a harmonious co-operation between the Supreme Being, individual Souls and the Natural World.

The fact is that nothing good can be achieved except through Unity and Harmony with the Supreme Being Who is the Supreme Principle of Goodness (Parama Shiva). Any attempt to find harmony, health and happiness by other means can only result in further suffering.

To put an end to suffering and to re-establish Universal Unity and Harmony, the Three Defects (Tri-Mala) have to be removed by means of the Three Precious Remedies or Three Jewels (Tri-Ratna) of **Right Spiritual Awareness** or **Right Belief (Sat Darshana)**, **Right Knowledge (Sat Jnana)** and **Right Action (Sat Achara)**.

Right Belief is belief in a Higher Reality as the One Source of all things. **Right Knowledge** is knowledge of the Oneness of all things. **Right Action** or **Right Conduct** is the sum total of actions, mental, verbal and physical, performed on the basis of the first two.

The systematic removal of these Defects is not merely a choice but a Universal Duty (Vishva Dharma) which all living beings are obliged to discharge to the best of their abilities.

Yoga therefore prescribes a series of Observances (Nityakarma) or Duties (Dharma) which together constitute a Conscious Spiritual Effort (Sadhana) leading to Perfect Harmony and Unity with the Supreme. The entire Spiritual Process that brings about the Awakening of the Soul to Life in Unity with the Supreme consists of four distinct steps:

1. Hearing the Truth (Shravana)

2. Thinking on the Truth (Manana)

3. Living in Unity with the Truth (Bhavana)

4. Becoming One with the Truth (Shiva-Samdhana)

By taking refuge in the Universal Truth, a human being who previously led an illusory existence, discards all false beliefs, feelings and actions and attunes himself with the Supreme Being, thereby becoming eminently real. Thus the Soul proceeds from Untruth to Truth, from Darkness to Light, from Death to Everlasting Life.

The Truth is that the **Supreme Principle of Goodness (Shiva)** is the Highest Reality and Yoga is the Path that leads to That Reality. Having heard this Truth from a competent Teacher or from Scriptural Revelation, the Seeker enters upon the Path.

The Four Stages or Degrees of Yoga Practice are: Entering upon the Path, Becoming Established on the Path, Advancing on the Path and Arriving. The Seeker enters upon the Path by accepting the Truth with the words "Shiva (The Supreme Principle of Goodness) is the Highest Truth and Yoga is the Path that leads to Him". This is known as Declaration of Faith (Shraddha) and constitutes the first of the **Five Duties (Pancha Dharma)**. The other four Duties are Remembering the Holy Name (Smarana), Charity (Daya or Dana), Fasting in honour of Lord Shiva (Upavasa) and Pilgrimage or Journey to Sacred Places (Yatra).

These five are called Duties (Dharmas) because they are obligatory for all followers of Yoga. Indeed, as the Supreme Lord Himself declared they ought to be observed by all of Mankind irrespective of religious creed. Various forms thereof are in fact observed by all of the World's great faiths. The observance of the Five Dharmas constitutes the Entrance (Stage One) and Becoming Established (Stage Two) upon the Path.

It is well to remember at this point that, strictly speaking, only that which is perfect can attain Unity with the Perfect One. Although the Five Duties are a necessary start, the fact is that they are seldom sufficient to render an imperfect human being perfect and capable of experiencing Unity with the Supreme. The systematic perfecting of the Soul is therefore required in order to proceed to Stage Three (Advancing on the Path) and Four (Arriving). This gradual perfecting of the Soul is attained by means of the **Eightfold Path of Yoga (Ashta-Patha)** consisting of the **Three Preliminary** and the **Five Advanced Practices**. While up to Stages One and Two, Yoga has many elements in common with other Paths, it is the Eightfold Path of Yoga that distinguishes it from and elevates it above all other Paths.

What is important to understand is that activities such as praying, alms-giving, visiting temples, fasting, pilgrimage and the like merely serve the purpose of keeping the faithful on the right track. They are no guarantee that those who observe them will attain Perfection and admission to the Highest Heaven in their next life. Indeed, in most cases, more than one life is necessary to attain the goal.

Although the observance of the above practices will as a rule prevent the faithful from falling from the right path, the final goal will be attained only after many lifetimes. Moreover, due to the weaknesses of the unawakened Soul, a person may at a future point deviate from the right path, thereby indefinitely prolonging his journey. This is evidenced by the fact that even among those nations with a high participation in religious observances, life may be burdened by all kinds of errors and defects.

By contrast, the Eightfold Path of Yoga guarantees attainment of the Highest Goal **in one to three lifetimes at the most**, depending on the amount of effort put into the practice and according to the Will of the Supreme. This is evidenced by the fact that advanced practisers of Yoga often attain Enlightenment in their present life.

Says Scripture: "He who is devoted to the Supreme Principle of Goodness (Shiva) even as others are devoted to material things, shall be liberated whether or not he performs the holy rites. He returns to this World once, twice or thrice and then no more. For he goes to the Abode of Shiva" (Shiva Purana, Vayaviya Samhita, II).

Due to the fact that Souls ascend to higher planes of existence upon attaining Perfect Enlightenment, only those who fail to elevate themselves are reborn on Earth. Rising materialism resulting from defective political, economic and religious beliefs means that fewer and fewer Souls attain Enlightenment. This leads to a rising proportion of unenlightened Souls living a life of ignorance, confusion, conflict and disease.

In consequence, to achieve a healthy and balanced society, a minimum of twenty per cent (20%) of the total population must be practising the Eightfold Path of Yoga. This applies both nationally and globally. The World can arrest its Spiritual and material downfall and change its course for the better only if the Eightfold Path of Yoga is regularly practised by at least a fifth of the global population.

THE EIGHT PRACTICES OF YOGA

THREE PRELIMINARY PRACTICES (PRATHAMIKA NITYAKARMA)

1. Self-Discipline (Yama) 2. Spiritual Observance (Niyama) 3. Posture (Asana)

FIVE ADVANCED PRACTICES (KARTAGAMA NITYAKARMA)

4. Breath Control (Pranayama) 5. Detachment (Pratyahara)

6. Concentration (Dharana) 7. Meditation (Dhyana) 8. Inward Absorption (Samadhi)

One of the unique features that highlight the universal character of Yoga is that it offers both specific physical exercises and Spiritual techniques for those who are more physically or more Spiritually inclined. By contrast, Western religions tend to stay well clear of both physical exercise and Spiritual techniques of awareness-expansion and rely exclusively on beliefs and rituals which moreover are constantly reinterpreted by their leaders to suit the political agendas of the day. Yogic teachings and practices, on the other hand, have remained as uncorrupted, powerful and effective as always.

While it should be obvious that the practice of Yoga, especially in its more advanced stages, requires a certain degree of discipline and commitment, the good news is that it may be practised by everybody irrespective of social, cultural or religious background, and according to each person's capacity, interests and needs. The only requirement is adherence to the Law of Unity with the Supreme (Yoga Dharma).

True happiness and fulfilment may be obtained only by adhering to this Law which is the **Eternal Law of the Universe (Sanatana Dharma)** and the Expression of the Supreme Principle of Goodness (Parama Shiva). Considering that the reward for adhering to It is nothing more nor less than the attainment of the **Four Goals of Life (Material Prosperity, Love, Righteousness and Spiritual Liberation)**, no effort ought to be spared by all thoughtful people in the World to embrace and follow the Path of Yoga to the best of their abilities.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 1

YOGA AND RELIGION

QUESTION: Some Yoga instructors advertise their classes as non-religious. Are we to understand that Yoga is not a religion?

ANSWER: Yoga defines itself as a Spirituality, that is, a field of experience that operates in direct relation to a higher Reality, called Spirit. In theory, this should also be the definition of genuine religion. In practice, however, religion is often based on personal beliefs about a higher Reality and about objects and persons regarded as holding a special connection to that Reality, which beliefs may sometimes be erroneous. Ordinary religion operates within the field of psychological experience and, in consequence, can rarely lead to genuine Spiritual experience as defined above. In terms of the evolution of human intelligence, Spiritual or Yogic experience constitutes an advancement from the stage of belief or psychological experience.

So the answer depends on two factors: on the meaning given to the term "religion", and on the enquirer's capacity to assimilate the distinction between belief or psychological experience on one hand and Spiritual experience proper, on the other.

For the purposes of the present consideration, we may classify human experience according to three degrees or levels, biological, psychological and Spiritual. The first concerns the body, being based on fundamental biological functions such as breathing, eating, sleeping or moving about; the second concerns the mind, being based on thought and thought-induced emotion; the third and highest level concerns the Soul or Spirit, being based on direct experience thereof.

Returning to the conventional, or official definition, religion is the belief in a superhuman, controlling Being (or Power) and in the need to obey and worship that Being (or Power) according to certain rules. It seems proper for a created being to obey and worship his Creator. In Yoga, therefore, we have no problem with that. The problem arises from the fact that the rules whereby God is obeyed and worshipped by the believer vary with each believer's social and cultural environment.

The fact is that ordinary religion is nothing but a culture-specific expression of belief. Cultures vary from country to country and from one social group to another. Even within the same religious denomination, degrees of variation may be observed in matters of belief and ritual. Conventional Scriptures are not always capable of setting a standard of religious practice. Religious leaders are equally incapable of direct communication with God and therefore unable to settle religious disputes.

Belief vs. Spiritual Experience

As observed earlier, belief is a function of our psychological field of experience, often entailing an elaborate culture-specific ideological system on the basis of which the believer lives his life. Since most Yogis, in this World, do not live in a cultural and psychological vacuum, this definition of religion may, at least externally, apply to some aspects of Yoga, yet it is by no means the central element to Yoga Practice or Teaching, all the more so in the case of those who are more advanced on the Path.

This, of course, is not to say that Yogis are atheists. Yogis do accept the existence of a Higher Reality and a Supreme Spiritual Principle, or God (Shiva).

However, they do this on the basis of direct experience of that Reality rather than mere belief in it. A Yogi is, by definition, somebody who has consciously established a direct link with a Higher Reality and realises his Unity with It on the basis of his own personal experience of It.

The Spiritual experience of genuine Yogis goes far beyond both belief and ritual worship therefore leaving religion - in its conventional sense - far behind. Followers of Yoga, who have not yet attained any higher experience, may well be described as "believers" as they still have to rely on belief in the Teachings of Yoga until such time when they experience Spiritual truths for themselves. However, even Spiritually inexperienced Yogis do not blindly accept cultural traditions or the opinion of religious authorities but tend to follow the guidance of Spiritually Realised Souls known as Siddhas (Perfected Ones), Mahatmas (Great Souls) and Sat-Gurus (True Teachers of Spirit) who generally speaking enjoy a greater degree of Spiritual Knowledge than the leaders of other faiths. Yoga, therefore, must be admitted to be closer to Divine Truth than established religion.

Yoga - the True Religion

Moreover, if religion (from Latin, religare) be taken to mean the process of re-linking, re-connecting, or re-integrating the individual Soul with the Higher Reality from which he has become separated, then this is precisely what Yoga is. In this sense, Religion (Re-Union) becomes synonymous with Yoga (Union). Indeed, it is true to say that Yoga is Religion in the true sense of the word, that is, the True Religion (Sat Dharma) per se.

Given that man's perception of Unity and Harmony with the Supreme Being constitutes the very essence of all genuine religious experience, Yoga which is Unity must be admitted to be the Essence of Religion and the Ultimate Foundation of all religious effort. And since Yoga, that is, the Experience of Universal Unity, already existed long before the coming into being of present-day religions, it logically follows that Yoga is the Original Religion.

This being so, instead of regarding Yoga as a religion, it would be both more appropriate and more useful for conventional religions to be regarded as modified forms of Yoga which is and will always remain the Supreme Spirituality. This fact will become evident if all cultural and ideological prejudices and uninformed opinions are left behind and the true relation of Yoga to other systems is examined within its proper historical and Spiritual context (see also The World's Oldest Faith).

To sum up, Yoga being a very practical system, the life of a genuine Yogi revolves not on belief about a Higher Reality but on his personal and direct experience of that Reality. Thus, while an ordinary person may content himself with the thought, "I believe so and so, and what I believe is correct - and sufficient - by virtue of my believing it", a Yogi concerns himself with discovering and exploring a progressively higher and more direct experience of reality.

This means that Yoga is both the essence and the culmination of a Spiritual Process that begins with religion or faith, representing therefore the natural and logical progression from the latter. The superiority of Yoga over conventional religions is also borne out by the fact that conventional religion tends to render its adherents psychologically dependent on belief and ritual whereas the fundamental function of Yoga is to emancipate its followers from all automatic or habit-induced patterns of life. In any event, the growing number of people abandoning conventional faiths and turning to Yoga (or Yoga-inspired systems) speaks for itself.

At the same time, while Yoga views certain religious beliefs (for example, the Western belief in the Resurrection of the physical body) as false, it is undeniable that other beliefs are true (for example, the belief in Angels or Gods, the power of prayer, etc.). In consequence, Yoga naturally acknowledges certain conventional religious beliefs and observances to the degree to which they possess social, psychological, aesthetic or Spiritual value and often incorporates these in its own practices and teachings. In practice, therefore, we find three aspects or degrees of Yogic activity leading to Re-Union with the Highest Reality:

1. Psycho-physical aspect based on physical and mental training. Apart from well-known physical postures, this may include elements of a religious nature, conventionally speaking, such as

praying, chanting, performing certain ritual or symbolic acts, attending Spiritual discourses, etc. At this stage consciousness is still attached to the material aspect of reality.

2. Mystical aspect based on communion with a Higher Reality brought about by inner Spiritual Intuition. Consciousness here begins to become acquainted with, and adapt itself to, Spiritual dimensions of reality. The main practice belonging to this phase is Meditation or Contemplation.
3. Metaphysical or transcendental aspect based on direct Recognition of Ultimate Reality and understanding of Its true relationship to oneself and the World, as a result of which the ordinary human condition is overcome and permanent Cosmic Consciousness is attained.

Yoga may be practised on any of these levels according to the practiser's inclination, needs or capacity, physical, psychological and Spiritual. It becomes evident from the above that conventional religion belongs to the incipient phases of Yogic activity (Phase 1) after which the practiser advances to higher stages of experience belonging to True Religion or Yoga proper. Yoga therefore, is much more than just a Religion. It is a Way of Life that leads to a Higher Experience.

What is important to understand is that, as the Unique Spirituality of Universal Unity, Yoga naturally embraces and at the same time completes and surpasses, all other forms of Spirituality. Similarly, Parama Shiva, the Supreme Principle of Yoga, represents the God of Christianity, the Buddha of Buddhism, Allah of Islam, Yahweh of Judaism and Odin or Zeus of Paganism while being at the same time much more than all these, either individually or jointly. This being so, it is not surprising that the modern World is increasingly accepting Yoga as the Spirituality of the future. In fact, since life outside of, or out of Unity with, the Supreme Being's all-inclusive Sphere of Universal Intelligence and Energy is logically impossible, it follows that all living beings in the Universe already are consciously or unconsciously practising various degrees of Unity with the Supreme, that is, Yoga. This realisation will sooner or later dawn on every intelligent being in the natural course of his or her Spiritual development.

To repeat, Yoga is certainly not atheistic or even "secular" - secular being basically the same as atheistic or godless. Indeed, if Yoga were to exclude True Religion - as defined above - from its teachings, this would amount to excluding itself, which is absurd.

While we are aware that individuals unconnected with The Yoga Council or the true teachings of Yoga may have their personal motives in qualifying their classes as non-religious, it would be beyond the scope of the present consideration to comment on these. We may merely observe that, historically speaking, established religions have been often misunderstood and worse even, misused for political and other wrong purposes. It is understandable, in the light of this, that some followers of Yoga wish to distance themselves from official religion. As regards Yoga Teachers associated with the Council, they may be safely assumed to fully agree with its principles and, in consequence, to share our views on this matter.

Having clarified this important point, we may now address the real issue: what truly matters from a practical point of view - and it is hoped that the enquirer is a practical person - is not whether Yoga is a religion but the undeniable fact that Yoga leads to Enlightenment, that is, an experience of reality that to our knowledge has remained unmatched by other systems, religious or otherwise.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 2

KARMA AND REINCARNATION

QUESTION: Is the belief in Karma and Reincarnation an essential aspect of Yogic Teaching?

ANSWER: Yes. However, it must be stated from the beginning that this is not a mere belief but a science based on facts of experience. As we shall presently demonstrate, Karma and Reincarnation represent two aspects of the same reality which is verifiable by both scientific research and rational analysis.

Those who are incognizant of Yogic principles, often are under the erroneous impression that Yoga is somehow less coherent and systematic an enterprise than official science. On closer examination however, Yoga proves to be perfectly logical and practical and thus scientific. As a scientific system, Yoga bases its teachings on three universally accepted criteria of knowledge, which are recognized by the vast majority of Mankind. These criteria are, in order of importance:

1. Personal Experience (Anubhava)
2. Reason (Anumana)
3. Testimony or Tradition (Agama)

The first and most important of these is Personal Experience, that is, knowledge acquired directly, either (a) through the senses (Pratyaksha, lit., what is perceived with one's own eyes) or (b) by the extrasensory means, commonly referred to as Intuition, Spiritual Intelligence or Insight (Pratibha). The second is the sphere of knowledge acquired by oneself through Reason or Logical Inference. The third is that form of knowledge which is acquired neither directly nor internally but indirectly and extraneously - from sources other than oneself. To this we may count traditional customs and lore in general but, more specifically, scriptural authority and the teachings of one's Spiritual mentor, that is, Reliable Testimony.

The Yogic Perspective

Although Karma and Reincarnation are commonly held to lie outside the sphere of experience of ordinary people, they nonetheless constitute facts of personal experience in the case of genuine Yogis or advanced practisers of Yoga who as a rule have the capacity to recollect at least fragments of previous lives. (The term previous life must be understood to include here all forms of existence whether terrestrial or extraterrestrial, embodied or disembodied, that predate what is commonly considered as a living entity's current conception or manifestation.) The fact that many people appear not to be in possession of this capacity does in no way diminish or invalidate the experience of those who are. The Yogis' experience by itself suffices to fulfill the first and most important criterion of knowledge (Personal Experience) as defined above, in the same way as scientific research suffices to demonstrate scientific facts to the scientific community.

A Scientific View

Yoga is a Science in its own right. Indeed, it is superior to Conventional Science in many respects. Yoga, therefore, is in no need of concurring with Conventional Science. However, explaining Yogic teachings in scientific terms has the advantage of making these teachings more accessible to those who are scientifically minded. We shall therefore briefly approach the subject from the second level (Reason or Rational Analysis), in terms that are acceptable to most branches of Western Science.

Thus we may observe that the literal meaning of the word Karma is action. However, given that every action or activity is known to produce a particular reaction, result, or effect, Karma has the secondary, implied meaning of effect. Karma, therefore, stands for both the actions performed by a person or Karma proper, *and* their effect, technically known as Karma-phala. Everything we do whether mentally (thoughts, feelings), verbally (words spoken) or physically (physical actions) has an effect on, and elicits a response from, the object of our actions.

For instance, if we sufficiently pollute the environment as to create major disturbances in the Planet's ecological system, we ourselves will eventually suffer the effects of our own actions; if we produce and consume food that is poor in essential nutrients or is physically or chemically contaminated, our health will

sooner or later be affected; if we entertain unnatural or negative thoughts and feelings, this will similarly affect our mental balance and well-being, and so on. Negative Karma is the result of negative actions and Positive Karma is the result of positive actions. This, in short, constitutes the so-called Law of Cause and Effect which, far from being mere belief is an undeniable fact of experience.

The same Law, the validity of which may be scientifically established through systematic observation of facts, requires that a particular action lead to a particular result or effect unless the effect of the said action be modified or even altogether cancelled by an equal or stronger opposite action or force. For example, environmental, physical or mental balance and health may be restored if and when, adequate, powerful and immediately effective measures to that end are taken.

Having thus demonstrated the reality of Karma as a determinant factor in everyday life, we shall now see how it might be linked to past lives. If on the scientific principle that energy is never lost but merely assumes a different form, we admit that the human life-force or Soul continues to exist - perhaps in a somewhat modified form - even after death, we must also logically accept that the person (or individual entity) concerned continues to be affected by the results of actions performed by him during his embodied existence, separation from the physical body being insufficient to cancel the natural effect of such actions. Thus the Law of Karma or Cause and Effect may well continue to have a bearing on a future existence, terrestrial or otherwise, allowing for the altered circumstances in each case.

Having admitted the logical possibility and even probability of life after death, if from the scientific premise that life is an ongoing process of evolution, of development from simple to complex life-forms, from lower to higher forms of intelligence, we further infer that a disembodied living entity - or Soul - continues to evolve even after death, we must also logically accept the possibility that the above mentioned process of evolution may - at least in some cases - require the return of the Soul to embodied, terrestrial life.

If, on the other hand, as a result of Yogic practices a Soul has moved on to higher planes of existence, having reached the final phase of evolution, rebirth or Reincarnation may no longer be necessary except in such cases in which the larger scheme of the Universe would still require it. A fully Enlightened Being, for instance, may willingly take birth on the lower planes in order to assist less evolved Souls in their own Spiritual growth. Be that as it may, the fact remains that in the same way as many scientists believe - if not officially, at least privately - in life after death, a rising number of them are beginning to recognize Reincarnation, if not as a proven fact at least as a logically acceptable possibility.

Why Can't We Remember Past Lives?

It hardly needs saying that, in the absence of any evidence to disprove Reincarnation, to deny its existence - or even possibility - would be illogical and unscientific. However, there still remains the doubt as to why no past lives are remembered by people in general. As it is a legitimate doubt, we shall now address it in some detail.

Strictly speaking, the only relevant statement the opponents of Reincarnation can make is, "I do not remember existing before". But as this statement does: (a) not of itself constitute proof, it is incapable of establishing their position and as it: (b) amounts to an admission of ignorance, it destroys the whole basis of their argument.

It is a fact of common-sense experience that absence of memory in respect of an object or event does not constitute proof of the latter's non-existence or non-occurrence. A person may not remember being born, yet he does not advance this as proof that he was not born. Moreover, the fact that we do not remember something now, does by no means imply that we will never remember it in the future.

Indeed, every act of remembrance is preceded by a state of forgetfulness or non-remembrance which is expressed by a thought, or articulated statement, to the effect that, "I do not remember this or that". Yet

remembrance of the object or event in question is invariably seen to arise at a subsequent point, it being only a matter of time before this occurs. In consequence, such a statement cannot be said to constitute decisive or final conclusion or proof. For there is no guarantee that remembrance will not arise in the future.

Furthermore, as the statement "I do not remember" implies ignorance in respect of the object or event under discussion, it cannot form the basis of any meaningful enquiry into facts. The non-believer must, therefore, concede that his position is untenable and admit defeat. If he continues to hold on to his beliefs, he does so for no rational reason but only out of a sense of stubbornness.

However, the aim of Yoga is not to demonstrate that non-Yogis are wrong. What Yoga wants to do is open people's eyes to a wider perspective of life. For this reason, the Yoga Masters offer a more positive interpretation of the "non-remembrance factor".

Given that, as already observed, the statement, "I do not remember existing before" renders impossible any constructive discussion, it is suggested by the Yoga Masters - in their capacity of Masters of Spiritual Knowledge - that it be read as "I remember not existing before". This is a grammatically and logically legitimate reading that apart from expressing essentially the same idea, has the advantage of revealing the true meaning of what the non-believer in Reincarnation is saying. Above all, it will clearly constitute an admission of previous life, the words, "I remember", presupposing the speaker's existence at the time in question.

Having obtained this admission, all we need to establish now is precisely who remembers what. The fact is that Spiritually untutored people ordinarily identify themselves with the physical body. In consequence, when speaking of themselves as "I", they mean above all the body as evidenced by numerous common expressions such as: "I am standing", "I have washed myself", "I am taller/thinner than you", etc. The statement, "I did not exist previously", is thus correct in so far as "I" refers to the current physical body which clearly did not exist before its present conception. As for the mind, it is an established fact that it often cannot even recall more recent events such as occurred in early childhood or for that matter the events in last night's dream, let alone what happened in a past life.

It follows from the above, that only when we identify with the conscious Soul, are we in a position to make a valid statement on the subject of previous life. Indeed, the Soul, the higher intelligence in us which is aware of both body and mind, never says, "I did not exist" or "I cannot remember". This is why it is impossible for us to imagine that there was a time in the past at which we didn't exist or that such a time will come in the future. For this reason, most people believe in a life after the death of the physical body. However, if we accept the notion of an afterlife, there is no logical reason why we should reject the thought of a previous life.

What is important to understand is that it is only the mind or thinking faculty who rejects previous life on the ground that it cannot remember. Yet since the Spiritually untrained mind can remember neither existing previously nor even coming into existence at a later stage, its capacity of recalling past events being either selective or altogether defective, it can hardly make a reliable witness. The situation does, of course, change dramatically when through the practice of Yoga we learn to identify with, and perceive reality from the perspective of, the higher intelligence of the conscious Soul.

Thus the argument advanced by the opponents of Reincarnation is not only insufficient for the purposes of establishing their own position but, when correctly understood, does actually support ours. This illustrates how even a controversial subject like Reincarnation becomes crystal clear when illumined by the self-luminous light of Yogic Knowledge.

The final answer as to why there usually is no remembrance of past existence is twofold. Firstly, because the active recollection of many lives would create confusion in the mind of an ordinary person who often finds even the events of a single life confusing enough and, secondly, because it would be unnecessary. The

evolution process generally requires that a particular episode in one's existence be left behind as soon as it has discharged its function of advancing the individual's growth and development, in much the same way as food is eliminated from the physical body once its essential nutrients have been extracted by the digestive system. Even so, those who are sufficiently curious, can by means of certain Yogic techniques extend their capacity of remembrance beyond the current existence. However, we would like to warn all such persons that revived memories of past lives are not in all cases pleasant, harmless or even helpful to those concerned in the way they might expect them to be.

We have now finally arrived at the third, and final criterion or level of knowledge: Testimony or Tradition. Recent scientific research has established that a number of people, in particular young children, can often remember aspects of previous lives which are verifiable on further investigation. (A fascinating, scholarly study of reported past-life memories may be found in a work by Ian Stevenson, M.D., entitled *Where Reincarnation and Biology intersect* - 1997.) Also, most religious traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, the Pagan Traditions of Ancient Europe, Africa and America, Judaism, original Christianity and some branches of Islam admit various forms of Reincarnation. The Yogic teaching of Reincarnation, therefore, must be admitted to fulfill all generally accepted criteria of knowledge, no further argumentation or proof being required.

Where do Souls come from?

Western Religions, that is, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, maintain that God created the World some 6,000 (or 5,700) years ago. First, He created Earth along with plants and animals, after which He created the first man and woman. The human race descended from that original couple. This sounds straightforward enough. However, a little reflection will bring up a number of questions. The first human couple was animated by God breathing life into it. But how about the rest of humanity? Where did they get their Souls from? Does God breathe life into every newborn child? Are present-day Souls simply offshoots of the original couple? Or, is there a stock of Souls in heaven waiting to be born into this World? Western Scriptures are silent on this very important issue.

The matter is complicated even further by biblical statements to the effect that the Sons of God mated with the daughters of Earth, giving birth to a race of Giants who, in ancient times, were great men of renown. Thus, before we have even begun to solve our first problem, the next question, or series of questions, immediately arises, namely, who were the "Sons of God" and the "Giants" and how are present-day humans related to them?

By contrast, Eastern Faiths in particular Yoga, are very clear on this. It is admitted that there, indeed, was an original couple, usually known as Manu and his consort Manavi. However, Souls are, by definition, Spirit. Spirit is infinite and can produce any number of Souls. Indeed, as the Holy Scriptures of India declare, Creation is not a one-off event but an ongoing process. Says Scripture: "As from a well-blazing fire, sparks by the thousand issue forth, so from the Ever-Living One beings manifold are born and to Him, verily, they do return" (Mundaka Upanishad II 1:1).

In consequence, the human Souls living on Earth may belong to one of four basic categories: (1) existing Souls who have previously lived on Earth in human form; (2) Souls who have previously lived on Earth in plant or animal form and have evolved into human beings; (3) Souls who have descended from higher, non-physical planes (to whom may belong the biblical "Sons of God"); these are of two kinds: Souls who have descended to Earth due to Spiritual regression, and highly evolved Souls who come down to Earth in order to carry out certain tasks in obedience to Divine Command; and (4) Souls who have recently been created.

How many Souls are there?

One objection that occasionally arises in the mind of Spiritually untutored persons is: as the human population on Earth is ever growing, should this not have exhausted the total number of Souls? The answer is, by no means. The fact is that Planet Earth constitutes only a small fragment of the Physical Universe

which in turn is a fraction of the Spiritual World. Man cannot even measure the Physical Universe, let alone the Non-Physical World. How then is he to know the total number of living Souls?

We have shown above that there are various types of Souls, from Souls who have existed from the Creation of the World (which occurred millions of years ago) to Souls who have recently been created. Thus the notion of the World running out of Souls becomes patently redundant and is not even considered by those who are better acquainted with Spiritual facts.

Even assuming, purely for the sake of argument, that the number of Souls were limited or fixed and that ordinary men knew what that number was, it would be absolutely essential to take into account the interval between a person's departure from, and return to, Earth. While highly advanced Souls may take centuries to return to Earth, ordinary people may be reborn after just a few months or years. When the World goes through a phase of Spiritual decline, this span may become even shorter. In such a case, it is quite possible, mathematically speaking, for even a fixed number of Souls to be reborn on Earth in seemingly rising numbers. However, as already stated, the number of Souls is not fixed. The problem of the World running out of Souls, therefore, does not arise except in the mind of the Spiritually ignorant.

Reincarnation vs. Resurrection

It is customary among the adherents of Western religions to declare that a deceased person "has gone to heaven" or "is in heaven". This is evidently an emotional, instinctive statement. The problem with this is not so much that it is just a guess - as the speaker has no means of knowing - but that it actually contradicts official Church teachings.

The official position of Western Religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) is that when a person dies, he remains in his grave, in a state of sleep-like existence, till the End of the World. That Day is also known as Last Day or Day of Judgment. On that Last Day, God will physically resurrect, that is, bring back to life all the people who have died from the beginning of Creation, along with their original physical bodies. Says the Bible: "When man's breathe departs, he returns to Earth" (Psalms 146:4). And the Quran: "On that Day, when men will hear the fateful cry, they will rise up from their graves" (50:41).

They will then be judged by God and sent either to Heaven or to Hell where they will stay for ever. Some Christian denominations believe that certain Souls will go through a temporary state of suffering (Purgatory) in order to become fit for admission to Heaven. In general, however, the official Western view is that a large portion of Mankind will go straight to Hell with no hope of reprieve. Says the Quran: "They shall sigh with remorse, but shall never emerge from the Fire" (2:167).

There is an obvious problem with this. Even in human society, imperfect though it may be, reformed criminals are sometimes pardoned. If we are expected to believe that the Western God is less compassionate and merciful than even human beings, the answer must be that we cannot believe in such a God. In Yoga, God is called Shiva precisely because He is the Supreme Principle of Goodness and the Embodiment of everything that is Good (Shivam). Apart from the obvious injustice of the above mentioned Church-promoted scenario, there are a number of other important problems that need urgent resolving.

In defence of Resurrection, it is said in the Quran that God brings the dead back to life in the same way as He gives life to dead land through rain. However, rain can only give life to a place where it is already present in dormant form such as seeds, roots and the like. Rain certainly doesn't resurrect dead leaves and rotten trunks. Dead bones cannot be brought back to life just as rain alone won't bring a barren stone to life even in a million years. The same applies to decayed and rotten flesh.

If anything, Nature's return to life in spring (or after rain) illustrates Reincarnation and not Resurrection. It is, after all, a recurring event whereas Resurrection only happens once. It would be odd, to say the least, to offer an account of a recurring event as an illustration for something that happens only once and then never again!

The truth is that, in the same way as, year after year, a plant sheds its leaves to grow new ones, so also the human Soul sheds his physical body to acquire a new one with each Reincarnation or Rebirth.

Says the Shiva Purana: "As a field flooded with water produces new shoots, so in the field of ignorance the seeds of past actions give birth to man: thousands in number are his bodies both future and past" (Vayaviya Samhita I 5, 53-54). This was the True Teaching which was known in the East long before the appearance of Western faiths.

If Western faiths said, "God will give you new bodies", it would be a different matter. But if they say, "God will bring back to life your old, decayed and rotten bones", then we must ask: how will God do that when the bodies are no longer there? God has given us reason for us to use it and not to substitute it with irrational beliefs. In Yoga, we have very sharp reasoning faculties which we have developed through millennia of defending Spiritual truths from other people's misunderstandings.

It is a well-known fact that, upon death, human bodies do not retain their original state for long. They are consumed by bacteria or disintegrate into their original organic and chemical components. Humans can also drown or their bodies committed to water after death, in which case they may be eaten by fish which in turn are eaten by humans. Decomposed corpses can be eaten by worms which are eaten by birds which are eaten by humans. Interred bodies also provide nourishment to grass that gets eaten by cows, sheep, goats, rabbits and other plant-eating creatures which again end up being eaten by man.

Thus the physical substance that once constituted one man's body, may, in the course of time, become part of another man's physical frame. To restore the original owner's body on the Day of Judgment, God would have to deprive another person or group of persons of some of their bodily constituents. This would be as aesthetically repugnant a vision to contemplate as it would be a blatant breach of Justice! Moreover, what about those that were born with some physical deformity, will they stay stuck with the same deformed bodies for ever?

Another rational objection to Resurrection is that it is wholly unnecessary. Souls, after all, are quite capable of being judged even in the absence of their physical bodies. Resurrection is also contradicted by Eastern Scriptures (Hindu, Buddhist, etc.) which unanimously espouse Reincarnation; it is contradicted by the near-death experience of thousands of people who invariably report a state of enhanced awareness and not one of unconsciousness that may be expected from a "sleeping" Soul; and it is contradicted by the experience of Enlightened Beings (such as Lord Buddha) who clearly remembered their past lives. Resurrection must therefore be rejected as false, irrational, unnecessary and Spiritually dangerous as it keeps the believer in a state of confusion and ignorance comparable only to the idea of "eternal sleep" it seeks to promote. This is the reason why we instinctively say, upon somebody's passing away, that he is "in heaven". Because deep down, we subconsciously acknowledge the absurdity of physical Resurrection and its antecedent state of "sleep".

The Purpose of Reincarnation

We have demonstrated that all humans possess intuitive knowledge of a posthumous existence on some higher, non-material plane, which is what they mean by "heaven" (that is, "up there", on some higher plane). But, will they automatically qualify for a life in the *real* Heaven? On closer examination, such a notion turns out to be as fanciful as imagining that everybody will one day be rich. Most people on Earth die in a state that falls short of Perfection in the same way as most people live and die in poverty.

The fact is that all religions make it absolutely clear that only Spiritually pure or perfect Souls may enter Heaven. The Bible, for example, says: "Unless a man be born again (that is, born to a life of Spirit), he cannot see the Kingdom of God"; "the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous"; "be you therefore perfect, even as your Father (God) Which is in Heaven is Perfect".

Perfection, therefore, must be admitted to be a necessary condition for admission to Heaven. However, if we are honest, how many of us can claim to be "as Perfect as God in Heaven"? Even a superficial observation of facts will establish that most people fail to reach a satisfactory degree of Perfection, or Fitness for Heaven, during their life on Earth!

So what happens to those that fail the Divine Test or Judgment? Such a Test or Judgment does indeed take place, but not collectively and not after a period of sleep lasting till the End of the World. The Souls are judged individually, soon after their departure from earthly life. So, do those who fail all go to Hell, as Western religions maintain? If they did, it would be a very brutal, black-and-white situation that is hardly compatible with a Compassionate God! Fortunately, the Western view is just another misunderstanding like Resurrection. The fact is that those who fail to reach the Highest Heaven simply go to lower heavens or even further down, to less luminous, darker places - that may be described as Hell - each according to the degree of Spiritual Fitness attained while on Earth.

From there, they may work their way up or down the Spiritual Scale, according to their capacity and inclination. Eventually, however, the Evolutionary Process impels all Souls to strive for, and attain to, Perfection. Thus it is written: "Having enjoyed the fruit of their good works in Heaven, ignorant men re-enter this World, or a lower. But he who knows the Supreme, becomes that very Supreme. He crosses over sorrow and sin and with a heart freed from the fetters of worldly desire, becomes a Liberated One and an Immortal" (Mundaka Upanishad I 2: 10 and III 2: 9).

How are Souls Reborn? (The actual Reincarnation process)

What is essential to understand is that what is conventionally called "death" is merely the assumption by the conscious entity known as "Soul" of a different mode of being. Upon separation from the physical body, the disembodied consciousness of the deceased person tends to be attracted to any of the following: 1) the body formerly inhabited by the Soul; 2) the place where death occurred; 3) some other object, person or locality that was of importance to the deceased during his embodied existence.

In the case of Spiritually-minded people, the attraction will be felt towards a temple, meditation hall or Spiritual teacher (Guru). In more advanced individuals, the attraction will have little to do with Earth and more with the Higher Planes.

The object of this attraction will often determine the place where rebirth takes place. For this reason, many Souls are reborn in the same country, village and even family as in their previous life.

Shortly before reincarnation takes place, the Soul will have a vision of the place, family, etc., where he is to be reborn. A glimpse of his future parents to whom he is karmically connected will suffice to awaken in the Soul the karmic latencies (samskaras) linking him with his future life.

The vision of the future parents engaged in physical union will cause the Soul to experience an irresistible attraction towards them. If the Soul is to be reborn as a girl, the attraction will be more towards the father; if a boy, the attraction will be towards the mother. He will be moved to draw closer and closer to the parents and, immediately before conception takes place, he will lose consciousness and enter the womb of the future mother where he remains until the actual birth.

The period of disembodied existence between death and rebirth may last from a few hours or days to decades and even centuries. In most cases, however, rebirth takes place in a matter of a few years. The reborn person has the capacity to recollect former lives and often begins to communicate such memories as soon as he can speak (about the age of two). In the absence of a positive adult response, these memories either naturally fade away or are consciously suppressed and the reborn person becomes more and more absorbed in the experience of his new life.

How Many Lives Do We Live?

All religions admit the existence of seven heavens or levels of existence. While the Seventh and Highest Heaven is the Abode of the Supreme Being (Shiva Laya or Kingdom of God) proper, the six lower heavens represent the evolutionary stages of life in which life evolves from the lowest to the most advanced life forms. The Holy Scriptures of India are unique in giving a precise number of rebirths a Soul needs to undergo in order to attain the state of Divinity (Shivatva). As a general rule, the total number of lives is 84,000.

The lowest forms of life are those in which intelligence is dormant and life is dominated by the primary elements of Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Ether (or Space). Metals, stones, liquids and gases belong to this stage of inanimate (unconscious) life during which the dormant intelligence undergoes 42,000 transformations or "rebirths". The next stage is that of half-sentient life forms such as plants and trees. Intelligence here enters a dream-like state in which it undergoes 15,000 transformations or rebirths.

The third stage is that of insects, worms and other primitive forms of sentient life, amounting to a total of 12,000 rebirths. The fourth stage is that of animals, birds and fishes, during which intelligence undergoes 9,000 rebirths. In the fifth stage, intelligence reaches a turning point where life acquires human form. The living Soul has now attained a sufficient degree of wakefulness to make a conscious effort to attain a better life towards which he strives for 6,000 births. It is also a critical stage where the Soul is in greater need of guidance than ever before. Man is no longer guided by automatic, animal instincts while at the same time he has not yet developed a sensitivity to Divine Guidance. His over-active intelligence can lead him to cause great harm to himself and to others. A Guide or Spiritual Mentor (Guru), therefore, becomes necessary for the Soul to reach his final destination. Here is where the importance of Yoga or Spiritual Practice becomes evident.

Under the Guru's guidance, man enters the Path of Yoga, which is the Path to Unity with the Supreme, and the sixth stage of Spiritual Evolution. Having entered the Path of Yoga, man is reborn only three more times, once as a Yogi and twice as a Divine Being. As these three last rebirths take place on the Higher Planes and, moreover, are effectuated with the Yogi's full and uninterrupted consciousness and memory, they are regarded as conscious and deliberate evolutionary steps and are not counted with the ordinary rebirths of unawakened forms of intelligence. Thus in the final stages of limited existence, man becomes more and more divine and finally attains Unity with the Supreme Spirit (Parama Shiva). This is the Ultimate Goal of Yoga and the true meaning of the teaching that "all things come from God and to God they all return".

As regards the moral, psychological and Spiritual value of this teaching, it cannot be overestimated as it expands our intelligence, enhances our awareness and deepens our understanding of life. (The mere reading of these lines will have already achieved this, according to each reader's intellectual and Spiritual sensitivity.)

In conjunction with the Law of Karma, Reincarnation goes a long way in clarifying certain important issues. It explains, for example, why some people are born in certain circumstances while others are not, especially in those cases for which official science and religion are either unable or unwilling to provide a valid explanation.

We may observe in this respect that, whenever an apparently innocent person or group of such persons becomes victim to illness, accidents, natural disasters or acts of terrorism, political and religious leaders conspire in erecting a wall of silence round the question as to why it happened or, to put it in different words, why did God allow it to happen?

Entire nations are condemned to a state of ignorance and apathy through this irrational refusal to look for answers to one of life's most perplexing problems. This State-and-Church imposed, politically correct infantilism renders people incapable of standing on their own feet and facing reality like grown men.

If people had better knowledge of Spiritual facts, they would be less inclined to allow themselves to be led on by ignorant and self-seeking leaders. This being so, it is the duty of Yoga as the Guardian of True Spiritual Knowledge on Earth, to redress this scandalous situation by providing the correct answers to life's manifold problems, in order that Humanity might see the Light and realise its true Destiny.

Knowledge of the Yogic Science of Karma and Reincarnation also serves the important purpose of protecting the Soul against lapsing into lower forms of life. Life can devolve to lower forms just as it can evolve to higher ones. Thus a human Soul may devolve to a Spiritually and psychologically subhuman level while physically still inhabiting a human form. Indeed, it is a universally observable fact that some humans behave in ways that are more characteristic of animals for which reason they can barely be said to be human.

Moreover, as Souls generally evolve from lower to higher forms of intelligence, some may, Spiritually and psychologically speaking, still occupy a subhuman position even though biologically speaking they are endowed with a human body. Conversely, others may have devolved to subhuman levels of consciousness and behaviour. This may happen temporarily, as a result of intoxication, for example, or more permanently, as a result of mental illness or Spiritual regression. In consequence, such individuals are instinctively described by their fellow men by a word that is normally reserved for an animal, for example, vulture, snake, dog, pig, ape, and so on. Quite apart from this, human bodies may also be inhabited, and human-like shapes assumed, by other non-human entities such as ghosts, evil spirits, demons, etc. Human appearance, therefore, cannot be said to constitute proof of humanity. This also debunks the politically correct, secular and anti-Spiritual view prevalent in atheist circles that "all people are equal". If they were, then some would not be in prisons or mental institutions, while others walk free, surely. Nor can we reasonably maintain that Great Souls like Lord Krishna, Rama and Buddha were on a par with ordinary men!

Sin and Punishment

To eliminate a misunderstanding known occasionally to arise in non-Yogic circles, we must state from the very beginning that being born in less than favourable conditions must not be automatically viewed as a form of "punishment for past sins", the matter being rather more complex than that, although in certain cases this view may be acceptable as the best interpretation.

The term "Sin" is capable of the widest spectrum of interpretation, from transgression against Universal Unity to the most minor and seemingly insignificant offence, including actions that constitute transgression according to the Spiritual Laws of the Universe but are not always regarded as such by the agent or by society.

Although it cannot always be proved that a person's apparently unaccountable suffering is the result of his own actions, the possibility can neither be disproved nor reasonably excluded. As already indicated, in some cases actions committed by a person or group of people in the past clearly bear a relation to events in their present life. For example, while Western countries invaded other parts of the World in the past, they are now subjected to mass immigration by millions of people from precisely those countries that previously experienced Western immigration.

Collective Karma

Karma, therefore, also applies on a wider scale. Thus when an entire family, village or country falls prey to war, famine, natural disasters, pollution or disease, this may be ascribed to the collective effect of the sum total of the individual karmas belonging to the affected population. The individuals who escape the fate of the majority in such cases are clearly those whose karma does not warrant such an end. As for the unfortunate majority, their suffering is either justified by their former actions (mental, verbal or physical) or it may be necessary in order to correct certain defects which are not always apparent to outsiders.

Yoga - the Antidote to Sin

Unity is God's Experience of Oneness with Himself and with His Creation. Unity, therefore, constitutes the very essence of life. Without Unity, life would fall apart and sink into chaos, annihilation and death. In consequence, all beings must conduct their life in Unity (Yoga) with God. The opposite to this is Disunity (Viyoga) or Separation from the Divine.

The state of Disunity or Separation from the Divine as well as any action that represents an expression thereof, is called Sin. Indeed, the English word Sin (Germanic Sind) is derived from the same root as Sunder, to divide, break away, separate oneself (from God). The very same idea is expressed in the Sanskrit language by the word Pataka (Sin, Transgression, Crime) which denotes "that which causes one to fall (asunder), to sink". The same word is also used to convey the sense of Hell, that is, a place, state or condition into which one has fallen as a result of Disunity with or Separation from, God.

The antidote to the condition of Sin, the actions that flow from this condition and their result (Hell), is Yoga, that is, Abidance in Unity with God. This is in full agreement with the original teachings of the Western faiths and is, therefore, an undeniable fact. Thus says the Bible: "Whosoever abides in (Unity with) God, sins not; but whosoever sins has not seen Him, neither known Him (because such an one is separated from God)" (1 John 3: 6).

Karma and Everyday Life

It is an indisputable fact that we are not all given the same starting chance in life. We are endowed with different bodies, different parents, different teachers, friends, etc. Even when bodily constitution, parents, environment and upbringing are identical as, for example, in the case of identical twins, the outcome is not always the same.

Now if we say that it is a matter of luck, we will have to explain what luck is as well as why some are favored by luck more than others. To date, no satisfactory scientific explanation has been offered. We cannot say that it is due exclusively to Destiny (or the Will of God) either, for God is, by definition, Good and Just. Why would God, the Supreme Principle of Justice, allow an injustice to take place? There must be another factor, therefore, that accounts for the perceived inequality and injustice of the apparently arbitrary difference in the basic conditions of people's life.

If we exclude external factors such as arbitrary Divine Will, as we have shown we have reasons to do, then we must assume that the prompting cause for our state and course of life is internal. In other words, there is something *in us* that attracts, or prompts the creation of, certain conditions and circumstances in our life. This is the only logical conclusion.

Indeed, as indicated earlier, we know from the observation of everyday life that every action gives rise to a corresponding reaction. This much is confirmed by modern physics. But it is not only our physical actions that produce an effect. Our words can also produce pleasure or anger in others and we can, for example, be held responsible for what we say in a court of law. And, of course, our thoughts are likewise capable of producing an effect on ourselves and on our environment.

Every state of mind, being a form of energy, necessarily interacts with other energies in and around us. Every constituent part of our body, from vital organs like the heart and brain to the smallest biological cell, vibrates or radiates energy in a certain way at a particular frequency, and so do our thoughts and feelings. The sum total of these energy vibrations forms a general, harmonious pattern the balance or harmony of which can be easily disrupted by disharmonious activities and this disruption can result in imbalance and disease.

Indeed, all Spiritual traditions agree upon the view that man's present condition is the fruit of his own actions, whether in thought, word or deed. Thus, the Quran says: "Whatever misfortune befalls you, it is the fruit of your own labours" (42:27). Equally, the Bible declares: "Whatsoever a man sows, that he shall also reap" (Gal. 6). In the Dhammapada (165), Lord Buddha says: "By oneself, indeed, is evil done; by oneself is one injured; to oneself belong both good and bad". The great Sage of Ancient Greece, Heraclitus of Ephesus (6th century BC) likewise taught: "A man's character is his fate".

Nor is it difficult to see why this timeless teaching appeals to millions of people all over the World. God being All-Good, He cannot reasonably be supposed to be acting in ways that are unfair, unjust, cruel or unwise. This being so, it is only reasonable to conclude that: (a) suffering is the product of the individual person, and (b) suffering serves the purpose of correcting the defects of the Soul such as pride, vanity and selfishness that separate him from God, and bringing him closer to the Creator.

Now while we may accept that a grown man's present condition is the fruit of his own actions or inner attitude, a newborn baby cannot be said to have had occasion for much mental or physical activity as to influence his mental or physical condition. Newborns actually exhibit their own, individually distinct personality. And personality presupposes memory. We cannot attribute this to genetic inheritance from the parents as even genetically identical twins can have distinct personalities. We must therefore logically admit that any actions as are capable of producing certain effects in the newborn's mind, body, etc., must have occurred prior to his conception and birth. It is precisely for this reason that the teaching of Reincarnation is introduced to explain the differences in people's bodily constitution, etc., as being the result of energy patterns that were developed in previous lives and carried forward to subsequent rebirths in the form of Karmic Seeds (Samskaras). Thus while some personal characteristics are inherited from the parents, others are entirely the product of individual Karma.

The Enlightened Masters of India have made this absolutely clear: "Karma evidently constitutes the seed of existence in all created beings, determining their birth, duration of life, as well as all experiences, both good and bad... The fruits of the land cultivated by a farmer in spring are enjoyed by him in autumn when his body is no longer the same [its cells, molecules, atoms and other constituent parts having in the meantime been replaced by new ones]. Thus even in this World, though actions are performed in one body, their fruit is enjoyed in another. This being so, it is legitimate for us to assume that experiences enjoyed in this lifetime are the result of actions performed in a previous existence." (Abhinava Gupta, 10th century India.)

Stages of Karma

Karma has three distinct stages or phases. 1. The sum total of past actions, mental, verbal and physical, whose effect is still to come into actualisation, is called Sanchita Karma. 2. Actions done either in a past life or earlier in the present life, the effect of which is already being experienced by the agent such as bodily constitution, place of birth, parents, professional occupation, etc., are called Prarabdha Karma. 3. Actions performed in this lifetime, the result or effect of which, if nothing is done to counteract it, will be experienced by the agent in the future, are what is termed Agami Karma.

While it is clear that a person can do little about some aspects of his actualised Karma (Prarabdha Karma) such as bodily constitution, parentage or place of birth, there is much he can do to avert the negative effects of past actions that are still to come to fruition (Agami Karma), provided he understands and follows the principles of Universal Law (Dharma), or Cause and Effect. Fully-Enlightened Souls are, of course, beyond Karma.

Karma and Divine Justice

It seems agreeable to universally accepted principles of Justice for a person to be held accountable for his actions. But how can a person be made to suffer for transgressions he is unaware, or no longer remembers, to have committed? Well, firstly, justice must be done irrespective of when the transgression has been committed. Secondly, even in human law, a criminal will not be exempt from punishment merely because

he is unaware of the law or cannot (or will not) remember committing a particular crime. And thirdly, a person who has committed a crime generally still harbours within himself the psychological inclinations or propensities that prompted him to his actions.

Now God is, indeed, Compassionate. However, this must not be interpreted to mean that He will extend His Forgiveness unconditionally to all. As the Scriptures (Shiva Purana, etc.) clearly declare, a sinner is forgiven when and to the extent to which he repents and willingly embraces the path of righteousness, and not otherwise. So long as a Soul still harbours tendencies that are capable of prompting him to commit a crime in the future, he may continue to suffer until such time as all the errors and defects have been eradicated from his heart and he is rendered fit for Unity with God.

Two things become obvious from this. Firstly, God, being Omniscient, He knows all the actions a person has done in the past as well as all the actions he will commit in the future. On the basis of that knowledge, and always for the ultimate good of man, God arranges suitable bodies and circumstances for man to enjoy or suffer the consequences of his own actions (or Karma). This means that Karma is not independent of God. No Karma can produce any effect without the Will of God.

Secondly, God is independent of Karma. He can and sometimes does cause things to happen for reasons unknown (and unknowable) to man. The fact remains, however, that man has a certain freedom of action and is, therefore, capable to contribute to his own destiny through his own actions. In consequence, although everything ultimately depends on the Will of God, knowledge of the Law of Karma helps us understand why God wills or allows, certain things to happen. This understanding enables us to know how to live life in Unity with God and experience happiness and fulfillment as a result.

What we need to remember at this point is the true meaning of suffering. Whatever may be the legal, medical or scientific view, the fact is that Spiritually speaking suffering is a symptom of Disunity. Happiness is the opposite of suffering. It is an experience that arises from a sense of Oneness or Unity with oneself, with a loved one, with Creation or with God. It is an elevating feeling that enables man to rise above ordinary experience. The highest form of happiness is experienced when we are aware of our Unity with God. Any feeling of pain pales into insignificance when compared to the bliss experienced when we are in a state of complete Unity with God. Suffering, on the other hand, is invariably experienced in direct proportion to our distance, separation or isolation from God Who is the Source and Ground of all life. For this reason, so long as absolute Unity with the Supreme is not established on Earth, suffering cannot be entirely avoided except in the case of those who have attained Enlightenment and Unity with God (Shiva Samyoga).

However, even in instances where suffering is correctly diagnosed as self-inflicted or as just retribution for past transgressions, the Yogic principles of universal love and compassion demand that it not be used to justify discriminatory attitudes or behaviour towards the persons concerned. For example, the fact that a person is born in an economically difficult situation does not entitle the others to entertain any feelings of hostility or contempt towards him. After all, God Himself, the Father and Creator of Mankind, allows His creatures to suffer not out of vengeance but out of love for them, suffering being a necessary experience in the Spiritual evolution of all living things.

As with any other Yogic teaching, people are generally encouraged to understand the Law of Karma in a way that is best suited to aid them and their fellow-humans in their material, mental and Spiritual progress. In other words, a teaching is only a good teaching to the extent that it brings those for whom it is intended closer to Truth, enabling them thereby to improve their situation in life.

Similarly, although as an inclusive system Yoga naturally incorporates Reincarnation - which as we have seen is a fact of experience - in its teachings, it is never allowed to develop into an obsession with the past. On the contrary, genuine Yogis always emphasise the importance of the present. While knowledge of the past is indisputably of great value in helping us understand the present, it is the present moment that ultimately provides the true foundation of Spiritual life. Indeed, the true value of Yogic Teaching and

Practice lies in its time-honoured capacity to lead to Spiritual Freedom by liberating the Soul from the endless cycle of Karma and Reincarnation.

Karma and Bereavement

The teachings of Yoga help us better understand life and enable us to create a better future for ourselves and for others. In particular, they help us understand Death which is an unavoidable fact of life. Suppose somebody among our close family or friends unexpectedly developed cancer and died. After the initial shock that we may experience as a result of this sudden loss, we may start feeling angry at the apparent injustice life has dealt us and the person we loved.

You see, humans often feel that they are faultless. Even if we are aware of our faults, we tend to hide them from ourselves and from others in the hope that they will go unnoticed and go away. Very often we need certain faults to be brought to our attention by others in order to consciously register them. The same happens in relation to those we love and feel close to. We tend to idealise them and overlook their faults even when, at the back of our mind, we know full well that they are not perfect. Even more so, when a misfortune befalls them. Hence our sense of injustice.

However, a little reflection will make us realise that a person may become ill from a whole string of causes and contributing factors such as, smoking tobacco, drinking alcohol, unhealthy food, exposure to pollution, physical and emotional stress, genetic predisposition, and so on. Many or all of these factors could have been eliminated or neutralised by means of a healthier lifestyle, for example. This in itself means that a degree of responsibility may reasonably be apportioned to the deceased.

If we now consider the matter from a religious point of view, we have no means of knowing whether the being we loved did not harbour any negative psychological tendencies that would warrant divine retribution or correction. Moreover, if we accept the doctrine of Reincarnation, we must also accept the possibility of certain actions in a person's previous life as a cause of his illness and resultant death. What becomes clear is that it would be unjust for us to blame it all on God.

Indeed, God tells us how to live a healthy, pure and harmonious life. He tells us what is right and what is wrong through His Prophets and Messengers although we often get carried away by personal interests and worldly pursuits and forget His Commands. We must understand what our Creator wants from us and implicitly follow His Word before we are in a position to judge Him. Unless and until we do so, we have no choice but to accept responsibility for our own life.

If suffering happens to cross our path, we must remember that it has a meaning and purpose which we will, sooner or later, discover in the course of our Spiritual growth. The Holy Scriptures of India (such as Shiva Purana) tells us that there are three kinds of Suffering: Spiritual, Karmic and Divine. Spiritual Suffering is caused by ignorance of Spiritual truths, wrong beliefs, etc., and manifests itself mainly as mental and emotional pain. Karmic Suffering is caused by past actions that were in breach of Universal Law (Dharma) and manifests itself as physical suffering. Divine Suffering is caused by incurring the displeasure of Divine Beings (such as Gods or Angels) and it usually occurs in the form of coming to harm through lightning, floods, earthquakes, war, poison, accidents, etc. It represents a form of suffering that may be accurately described as Divine Retribution proper, although Karmic Suffering also takes place according to Divinely established laws and may equally be termed Divine.

In the materialist and largely atheist World of today, it is of particular importance to understand the meaning of Divine Suffering. All religions acknowledge the existence of Divine Beings, whether they be called Gods, Angels, or some other equivalent name. However, while Eastern Faiths honour these beings by means of established rituals and prayers, Western Faiths generally ignore them. Even worse, they often ridicule the Gods honoured in the East.

The causes of this deplorable attitude are to be found in the erroneous belief that if you worship the Supreme God, then it becomes unnecessary to pay attention to lesser Divine Beings. What is being ignored is that these beings are actually Manifestations or Powers of the Supreme and are well capable of influencing human life in many ways. The fallacy of this kind of thinking becomes apparent when we consider that even in human society, no matter how much we honour the leader of a country, if we are disrespectful to his appointed ministers, judges, police and armed forces, we can still be charged with contempt of the authorities and get punished accordingly.

In the same way as most people have no direct access to a country's leadership, they have no direct line to God. Imagining that they do, can only make matters worse. This becomes evident from the fact that nations who reject the Gods are generally more prone to being afflicted with corruption, poverty, crime, violence, wars, disease and natural disasters than those who accept and honour them. For example, Muslim Pakistan and Bangladesh as opposed to Hindu India, North Korea as opposed to South Korea, Indonesia as opposed to Thailand, China as opposed to Japan. Western faiths have notoriously failed to prove that they can improve their lot by rejecting time-honoured Eastern practices.

In addition to the three main forms of suffering we have already discussed, we may mention Dharmic Suffering, that is, suffering for the sake of Dharma. This is either consciously self-inflicted, or imposed upon us by God, purely for the purpose of strengthening our resolve to adhere to Spiritual life. As such, it is always rewarded by an enhanced awareness of Spiritual truths and an experience of pure, Divine Happiness or Bliss (Ananda). Dharmic Suffering is always attended by a firm conviction that it is for a good purpose. Suffering, therefore, can have a positive function, on account of its being capable of leading to positive experiences. For this reason, Suffering is sometimes interpreted as a "test", not unlike an exam we may have to sit at school. It is ultimately for our own good.

Indeed, suffering ultimately has a corrective and educational function in that it corrects harmful tendencies in man and induces the person or persons concerned to adopt forms of behaviour that are more in harmony with Universal Law and thereby avoid future suffering. Suffering may leave us in a state of anguish, confusion and bewilderment. However, by practicing Yogic Meditation, consulting a qualified Spiritual Preceptor (Guru) or through certain dreams and omens we may gain insight into the causes of our suffering and its remedy.

Thus certain forms of suffering such as Spiritual Suffering, may be avoided or eradicated by means of Yogic Practices (Sadhana) such as Spiritual Studies and Meditation. Karmic Suffering may be removed through the seven remedies of right thinking, right intention, right action, right speech, right livelihood, right food and right medical treatment. Divine Suffering is removed through the eight means of mind-control, atonement, prayer, propitiation (of the God whose displeasure one has incurred), magic incantations (mantras), auspicious observances, charitable gifts and vows. While some remedies are more immediate and short-term in their effect, others are gradual and long-term. For example, while some physical conditions may require immediate medical attention, their recurrence is best prevented through the practice of Yoga. Ultimately, therefore, Yoga is the best remedy for all suffering and the only guarantee for well-being and happiness.

Although many forms of suffering may be temporarily cured by means of medical treatment, propitiation of Divine Beings, etc., suffering can only be permanently eradicated through worship of the Supreme Being Himself. Says the Shiva Purana: "The various kinds of afflictions arising from sins shall be destroyed only through the worship of Shiva (the Supreme Lord) and not through any other means" (Rudra Samhita I 4, 46). The highest form of worship is living in Unity with God. And that is Yoga.

This brings us to another important Yogic teaching, namely, that we are eternal Souls and that our natural state is one of Peace and Happiness. Were our natural state not such, it would be very difficult, even impossible, for us to experience Peace and Happiness within ourselves. Indeed, from the perspective of the immortal Soul, any episodes of suffering are temporary and incapable of disturbing the deeper layers of our natural happiness and peace, just as waves that are whipped up by a storm cannot reach the bottom of the sea which remains always peaceful and still.

To escape suffering, therefore, two things are needed. We must live a life in Harmony with Divine Law, and we must develop an awareness of ourselves as living Souls. This is achieved by means of Yoga, that is, by practicing Unity with the Supreme. Some important questions that need to be raised in the face of suffering, are: have I lived a life in complete harmony and Unity with God? Have I cultivated an awareness of myself as a living Soul? The answers we find to these questions will enable us to find the way to a genuine and lasting solution to our problems, if not immediately, at least in the future.

In this connection, we may consider the following story which is related in the Scriptures. Once a great King desired to give his daughter in marriage to the most pious man in the land. He therefore let it be known to all, that he who could abide absorbed in contemplation on Lord Shiva, the Lord of Yoga, for a full year, would be entitled to the kingdom and the princess's hand. Hearing this, a bandit who was famed for his misdeeds made up his mind to deceive the King through a cunning trick.

Thus thinking, he disguised himself as a Yogi and mingling with the others, sat down at the foot of a tree on the bank of Holy River Ganges. Though at first it was mere pretence, as the months passed by, he began to meditate in earnest and before long entered into the deepest absorption. At the end of the appointed year, the King came to inspect the achievement of every contestant and perceived such great inner peace and happiness radiating from the bandit's person as he could find in no other.

The King bowed down before him and with great reverence offered him his realm and his daughter as per the royal promise. But the bandit-become-Yogi opened his eyes and spoke with a gentle smile: "With your gracious permission, O great King! I shall continue to meditate upon the Lord of Yoga by Whose Contemplation a man has all his desires fulfilled". Thus speaking, he fell back into meditation. The power of Yoga is such that even when practised for improper reasons it eventually yields the right results!

Thus is it written: "Just as trees are reduced to ashes by a forest fire, even so the sins of one who is devoted to the Supreme Lord are burnt away in the fire of His Name". And, "O great Sage! There aren't so many sins in this World as the power of Shiva's worship cannot destroy" (Shiva Purana, Rudra Samhita I 4, 49, 60).

We have thus demonstrated three important facts concerning Yoga. (1) We have demonstrated that Yoga can accurately identify the causes and purpose of Suffering, including in cases where other religions cannot or will not offer any satisfactory answers. (2) We have demonstrated that Yoga teaches us the correct way in which we are meant to react to Suffering. (3) We have demonstrated that Yoga (the Practice of Unity with the Supreme) is the ultimate means of avoiding Suffering and creating Happiness.

Yoga - the Path to Freedom from Karma and Reincarnation

In conclusion, what is important to understand is that Yoga promotes the teaching of Karma and Reincarnation because it corresponds to the facts of life. From a Spiritual point of view, it is false, and therefore irresponsible and criminal, to tell people that they will go to Heaven just by belonging to a particular, man-made faith. The fact is that, whether we like it or not, most people on Earth will be reborn many more times. It is important for them to be prepared for this. However, Yoga does not regard Karma and Reincarnation as a never-ending cycle from which there is no escape. Nor is this cycle the highest Reality of Yoga. There is something higher than the Law of Nature or the Law of Cause and Effect, namely, Divine Law or the Spiritual Law of the Universe (Dharma). While lower forms of life such as plants, animals and undeveloped humans are subject to the Law of Nature (Karma), higher ones are subject to a Higher Law which is the Law of God (Shiva Dharma).

The higher a Soul has ascended on the Evolutionary Scale, the more his actions are in harmony with Divine Will. In consequence, as he advances towards the highest Goal, he is less and less affected by Karma. The ultimate aim of all Spiritual Effort, therefore, is to free oneself from the burdens of Karma and its resultant

cycle of death and rebirth. By adhering to the Spiritual Law of the Universe (Sanatana Dharma) man attains Unity with the Supreme Being (Shiva Samyoga) and enjoys unlimited freedom of Knowledge and Action.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 3

THE WORLD'S OLDEST RELIGION

QUESTION: Is Yoga really the World's oldest Spiritual system?

ANSWER: This may sound as an extraordinary claim to make yet, on reflection, it could hardly be otherwise. To begin with, there must have been a first Spiritual Path that existed before all the others. Most other paths are known to have had a historical and human founder. In other words, they were initiated by individuals who were born to human parents, lived and finally died. This applies to the founders of Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism and many others.

Yoga, on the other hand, is known to have been revealed to the World by God, the Primal Lord (Adinatha, Shiva) Himself at the beginning of time. To discover the roots of Yoga we must, therefore, go beyond history, beyond measurable time, beyond even the Creation of the World.

All religions agree that, in the beginning, God alone existed and there was nothing else besides. At that stage, God must have been in a state of Absolute Oneness and Unity with Himself. Since Yoga is Unity, it represents an accurate description of that Original State. Consequently, it must be beyond dispute that Yoga stands in a relation of precedence or priority to all other faiths.

Moreover, Yoga is not only the World's first faith; it also permeates, inheres in and supports, the other faiths. How is that? It will be remembered that the Original State prior to Creation was one of Absolute Oneness and Unity. Unity then is the power that animates all true religions in the World. It is out of the desire to experience that Original Unity again, that all religions have come into being. Let us briefly review the fundamentals of some of the World's religious traditions. Judaism may be said to consist in adhering to the Law of Moses which was given to Mankind that man might live in Unity with God. Christianity may be said to be centered on the redeeming Power of God. Islam is based on submission to the Will of God. Buddhism is about escaping from suffering (which is caused by separation from God). And Hinduism aims at the immersion of the human Soul in God.

Now, none of this would be possible without Unity between man, Universe and God. Yoga, which is Unity, must therefore be admitted to be the driving force behind, as well as the means whereby fulfillment is found in, each and every one of the aforementioned traditions.

Finally, since Yoga is the Experience of Absolute Oneness and Unity with God to which experience all Creation must ultimately return, it becomes evident that Yoga is also the Highest Spirituality. We have thus established that Yoga is not only the first but also the last, there being nothing beyond or above it. Yoga is the final word on Spirituality and the final experience to which all religious effort ultimately leads. As Scripture says, "As the tracks of all beasts, both large and small, fit in the track of the Elephant, even so all Teachings are contained in the Teaching of Shiva. As the Abode of Snow (Himalaya) is among Mountains, as the Moon among the Stars, as the Sun among all things that shine, so this Teaching of Shiva is the Lord of all Teachings" (Shiva Rahasya 12:62-63).

THE PROOF

We have so far analysed the issue from a purely logical and Spiritual perspective and we have shown that our conclusion is supported by Yogic scripture. We shall now demonstrate that it is also supported by the evidence of Western scriptures, so that the last clouds of doubt are dispelled from the seeker's mind. The Bible says: "This then is the message which we have heard of him (Christ), and declare unto you, that **God is Light**, and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1, 5). Now this teaching which is central to Christianity must be dated to pre-Christian times. All we have to establish is where it originated.

Writing not long after the composition of the Bible, St. Hippolytus of Rome informs us that, "there are some among the Indians who live a self-sufficient life, who abstain from eating living creatures and cooked food, and subsist on fruit. They say that **God is light**, not like the light one sees, nor like the Sun or fire, but like the Light of Knowledge whereby the secret mysteries of Nature are perceived by the wise" (Philosophumena XXI - The Brahmins). Yogic teachings had obviously penetrated the very heart of the Classical World.

As we know, these teachings were already established in India long before the rise of Christianity and other Western faiths. Says the Rig Veda: "In the beginning shined the **Source of Light**, the One Lord of all created beings" (X, 121:1). Lord Shiva, the God of Yoga, is known as **Light of the Universe** or **World-Illuminator (Loka Pradipaka)**. From the works of ancient European writers we know that the Egyptian City of Alexandria, which was an international centre of culture and learning in those times, was frequented by Indian sages. The Bible tells us that Jesus was taken to Egypt by his parents. Now he could hardly have avoided coming into contact with Yogic teachings, seeing that they were known as far away as Rome.

As the ancients said, **it is from the East that all light comes**. The Bible itself speaks of "wise men from the East". This fact finds confirmation even from some of the most unexpected quarters. Pope John Paul II himself, in his apostolic letter of 2 May 1995 declares: "The **Light of the East** has illumined the universal Church, from the moment when "a rising sun" appeared above us." Thus the Eastern origin of all faiths may be regarded as established beyond reasonable doubt. After all, even the Sun rises in the East. And we cannot deny what is patent fact.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 4

THE UNITY OF ALL FAITHS

QUESTION: Is it true that all faiths are ultimately one?

ANSWER: In the same way as the Sun is variously perceived as strong or mild, as shrouded by clouds or reflected on the surface of the Moon according to time, weather conditions and geographic location, all differences between the various faiths are due entirely to the cultural and political peculiarities of the countries where they have evolved or in which they are being practised. To better understand their inherent unity, it is necessary to first obtain an overview of the elements they have in common. All faiths accept the following facts:

1. There is a Higher Reality, Being or Force That creates and governs the World.
2. This Higher Reality, Being or Force, commonly known as God or some other equivalent designation, is Eternal, All-Powerful, All-Knowing and All-Good. In short, God is Perfect.

3. Happiness is a state of Unity and Harmony with God. The closer we are to God the happier we are. Distance or separation from God results in unhappiness and suffering. The highest happiness is called Heaven, Nirvana, Godhead (Shivatva) or Divinity.

4. Life exists on three basic levels: Terrestrial, Intermediate and Supreme. The Terrestrial or Physical Plane is inhabited by human beings and other creatures that are separated from God. The Intermediate or Non-Physical Plane is inhabited by beings who live in various degrees of Unity with God. Such beings are called Saints, Angels or Gods.

One God or many?

What is important to understand at this point is that by "Gods" we do not mean independent entities but beings who are manifestations of and act in harmony with the Supreme Being Himself Who is their Overlord. Concerning these Divine Beings, the Bible says that no other Gods must be worshipped apart from God. Their existence, however, is nowhere denied. On the contrary, the older portion of the Bible (Old Testament) clearly acknowledges it. Says the Bible: "God stands in the Congregation of the Mighty; He judges among the Gods" (Psalms 8:21).

Identical statements may be found in pre-biblical traditions such as that of Ancient Greece and India. Thus in Book VIII of the Iliad and Book I of the Odyssey, God is called Father of men and Gods, King of kings and the Most High, while God Himself declares: "I am above all others, both Gods and men". Archaeological excavations have recently brought to light an Ancient Greek temple (near Mount Olympus) which was dedicated to God the Highest Who rules over the other Gods.

Scriptural confirmation of Ancient monotheistic beliefs are likewise found in the holy books of the Hindus: "In the beginning shined the Source of Light, the One Lord of all created beings. He established and supports this Earth and Heaven. Giver of the vital breath, of strength and vigour, He Whose Commands all the Gods acknowledge" (Rig Veda X, 121:1-10). In the Bhagavad-Gita, God declares: "I am the Source and Origin of the Gods and Great Sages" (10:2).

In the Shiva Purana, the Gods address Lord Shiva, the Supreme God, with the following words: "O Great Lord! Lord of the Gods! You Alone create, sustain and annihilate the Universe. You are the Supreme Being. We bow to You, the Great Lord, Who are greater than the greatest, etc." (Shiva Samhita II 41, 1-3). Moreover, it is written that, "the worship of Deities other than Lord Shiva is futile [for the purpose of Salvation]. One should therefore be exclusively devoted to Shiva and none other (Rudra Samhita I 4, 56-57)".

This clearly refutes the fanciful notion entertained by Bible-based religions of themselves as the only ones to admit a single Supreme Being or God. Indeed, it must be said in this context, that the term Monotheistic - believing in One God - may also be interpreted to mean "believing in God Alone" (from Greek Mono, alone, and Theos, God). This is precisely what Eastern Faiths do. They believe that God Alone exists and that everything else is just a temporary Appearance or Manifestation, of God. Says Scripture: "All this is perceived (or projected) by God within Himself", "This World, which is but a mass of thought, is thought by Him, and in Him it disappears", etc. (Shiva Purana, Maitri Upanishad).

We have thus demonstrated that Eastern Faiths who believe in One Reality Only, are the true Monotheistic Faiths and not their Western counterparts who believe in Spirit and Matter, Three Eternal and Different Persons (God the Father, Holy Spirit, God the Son), God and Devil, etc.

As far as the Gods of non-biblical traditions are concerned, they evidently are on a par with the Angels of the Bible and the Quran. As such, they mostly inhabit the Intermediate or Non-Physical Plane although they may on occasion descend to Earth either as radiant Light Beings or in human-like shape.

Finally, the Supreme or Divine Plane is inhabited by God Himself and all the beings who have attained Absolute Unity with Him and therefore exist as One Supreme Being.

5. The human Soul attains the state of Unity with or Closeness to God by shedding his imperfections such as wrong thinking and faults of character and becoming Perfect or God-like. Says the Bible: "Be you therefore perfect even as your Father (God) Who is in Heaven is Perfect" (Mat. 5:48); and "All Scripture is given by Inspiration of God that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16,17).

6. The process that leads to Perfection, Unity with God or Supreme Happiness is called Spiritual Practice (Sadhana). Spiritual Practice is of two kinds: inferior and superior. The inferior kind comprises all religious and ritual practices such as attending places of worship, praying, giving alms, etc. In Yoga, the main religious practices are the Five Duties (Pancha Dharma) as explained in Teachings and Practice. They enable the human Soul to attain a degree of Unity with God and avoid falling into disunity with Him.

However, due to man's many imperfections, in most cases Specific Spiritual Practices have to be applied to attain Perfection, Heaven and Supreme Happiness. These practices include prolonged periods of prayer, studying the Scriptures, etc. In Yoga, they are known as the Eight Yogic Practices (Posture, Breath-Control, Meditation, etc.) and are regarded as superior to the first kind, constituting an infallible means of attaining Perfection.

7. Resurrection or Rebirth and Ascension to Heaven. Following death, the Soul returns to life. The observance of Spiritual Practices of the superior kind leads to the Soul's Perfection and Elevation to the Realm (and status) of God either during or after the current lifetime. On this point, Western religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) are of the opinion that man lives only one life before a final judgment regarding his fitness for Heaven is made. This view, however, must be rejected as wholly unsatisfactory: even a superficial observation of facts will show that the vast majority of Mankind is unable to become perfect and fit for admission to Heaven in just one lifetime.

Eastern faiths (Yoga, Hinduism, and Buddhism) therefore teach that more than one life is necessary. It is not difficult to see why. If God admitted imperfect Souls to Heaven, this would render all religious teachings and practices meaningless. If He did not admit them, it would be unfair to reject such Souls after just one life on Earth. God being All-Good, He must give them a second chance. In consequence, Eastern faiths which believe in the Supreme Being's Infinite Compassion, teach that Souls are reborn repeatedly until Perfection is attained. Says the Upanishad: "Having enjoyed the fruit of their good works in Heaven, ignorant men re-enter this World, or a lower. But he, who knows the Supreme, becomes that very Supreme. He crosses over sorrow and sin and with a heart freed from the fetters of desire, becomes a Liberated One and an Immortal (Mundaka Up. I 2:10 and III 2:9).

This view was initially accepted even by Western religions. It was accepted by the Sages of Ancient Greece and the Founding Fathers of the Christian Church. It is never denied in the Bible and it is taught in the Quran: "God gave you life when you were dead and He will cause you to die and then restore you to life and at last you will return to Him" (2:28). Some Muslim scholars may object that this is not how they would interpret this verse. That may be so. But as our Muslim friends, no doubt, are aware, the Quran - like other Scriptures - is capable of various interpretations (several of which are officially recognised) and we on our part are entitled to draw our own conclusions.

The fact is that Reincarnation is not alien to Islam. It is traditionally accepted by many Muslims in the Lebanon, Iran and other countries close to Arabia, the homeland of Islam. Moreover, historical evidence shows that the doctrine of Reincarnation was widely taught in pre-Islamic Middle East at least from the first century of the current era (CE). It is clear therefore that far from representing a late introduction to the Islamic World, it has been part of the original, local culture even if it is not always recognised as such by present-day Muslims.

In the light of these facts we cannot but conclude that the apparent differences between the two viewpoints are due to different levels of scriptural meaning and interpretation. Thus, on a lower level, verses such as the one under discussion may be regarded as referring to Resurrection while on a higher, more Spiritually advanced level, as referring to Reincarnation. While the former interpretation may be sufficient to satisfy Spiritually untrained minds, the more enlightened among Mankind no doubt correctly view the latter as closer to the Original Tradition and to Truth.

This conclusion is supported by scriptural evidence. Both the Bible and the Quran relate that at the time of their respective revelation (1st and 7th centuries CE), there were numerous skeptics (or what may be termed materialists) who rejected the notion of any life after death, let alone Resurrection or Reincarnation. It is precisely this kind of people that would have required a significant amount of persuasion on the part of a new religion intent on gaining influence among the masses. Obviously, once the doubters have been persuaded, it would be that much easier to convert the rest.

Indeed, that the Quran was originally addressed to a mainly materialist audience is evident from its description of Heaven as a place where the believers will be "married to dark-eyed virgins, wear silk clothes and gold jewellery, eat and drink to their heart's content in gardens with running streams and surrounded by servants", etc. These are clearly materialist preoccupations that would have found a resonance with those who cannot conceive of anything higher, but would have been of little interest to Spiritually elevated Souls.

Moreover, in the Quran, God addresses the Arab people as follows: "We have sent you an Apostle of your own who speaks to you in the Arab tongue, because before you were ignorant". Thus even the Quran admits the ignorance of the Arabs at that time. And you cannot teach the higher truths of Religion to ignorant people. It seems reasonable to deduce from this that Resurrection was put forward as a simplified - and more easily acceptable - version of Reincarnation in order to render it more palatable to simple-minded materialists while Reincarnation proper remained the preferred view among the educated classes, that is, those who were more sensitive to Spiritual truths, such as the Gnostics and the Theosophists (followers of Divine Wisdom or Tasawuf, in Arabic) who in the Muslim World came to be known as "Sufis", that is, Sophists or men of wisdom. In fact, this situation has remained unchanged even today. While the ignorant, uneducated and fanatical elements in the Muslim World continue to strictly adhere to the doctrine of physical Resurrection, the educated classes follow the lead of the great minds of Islamic Mysticism, such as Mansur-al-Halaj and Rumi. Reincarnation must therefore be regarded as the original teaching and true meaning of Resurrection which moreover is based on facts of experience (see [Karma and Reincarnation](#)).

We have thus resolved the only point of disagreement between Eastern and Western faiths and established their inherent Unity. All other perceived differences are of a cultural and political rather than religious nature. They can only lead to childish disputes and must be regarded as unworthy of consideration in the present context.

But - are all Religions the same?

Unfortunately, they are not. The fact that all religions are essentially one - in the sense that they are all based on the same Spiritual truths - does not mean to say that they are also equal in practice. To begin with, some religions are genuine (Sat), being Divinely revealed. Others are man-made and therefore false (Asat) even if they profess to be revealed by God.

In addition to this, just as water, though coming from a pure well, may become contaminated as it makes its way into ditches, lakes, rivers, seas and cesspools, so also, religion can and does become contaminated as it comes into contact with human ignorance and its attendant excrescences such as political and financial interests.

We only need to think of the forced conversions, "holy wars", slavery and genocide the Western World has engaged in in the name of religion, (slavery, for example, is approved by the Bible and the Quran) and

compare this with Yoga's own record of peace, tolerance, wisdom and compassion, to realise what a gigantic mistake it would be to believe the myth that all faiths are literally the same!

Religions are true when and to the extent that they agree with YOGA which is the SPIRITUALITY OF UNIVERSAL UNITY and TRUE BROTHERHOOD OF MAN, and false to the extent that they disagree.

Religions, therefore, that are closest to Yoga, that is, to the One Original and True Faith (Sat Dharma), must be admitted to be the least contaminated and hence the purest (Shuddha). These are: Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism as well as Bon-po (the religion of Tibet), Confucianism, Taoism (the religions of China) and Shintoism (the religion of Japan). The main activities of these religions are Spiritual studies, prayer and meditation. Religions that are furthest away from the Original and True Faith, on the other hand, are the most contaminated and impure (Ashuddha). They are Christianity, Communism and Islam and are invariably involved in political, financial and military machinations and terrorist activities.

In practice, therefore, we may divide Religion into Eastern and Western. Eastern Religion is that which comes from where the Sun rises, that is, from the True Light Source. By contrast, Western Religion comes from where the Sun sets, that is, from a Place of Darkness. This is why it has been said that Light comes from the East. Nobody has ever said that light comes from the West. To say such a thing, would contradict what is patent fact.

This fact is clearly reflected in the geographical and political situation of the main religions. India, which is known from ancient times as the Land of Glory (Bharat Varsh) as well as Land of Righteousness or Land of the Right Faith (Dharma Bhumi), is situated at the centre of the Eurasian Continent. Indeed, the Indian City of Ujjain was known in ancient times as the Spiritual and cultural Centre of the World. It was known as Ozene to the Ancient Greeks, while the Arabs called it Arin.

Now all religions that originated in India - Yoga, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism - are pure, highly Spiritual and peaceful religions. India has never given birth to such abominations as Capitalism, Communism, Colonialism, Globalism and other political and economic aberrations as are found in the West. The source of this filth is found to the West of India. The further West you go the filthier it gets. It cannot be mere coincidence that Colonialism, Capitalism and Communism all developed in Britain, one of the westernmost European countries. The prophets of Global Communism and Revolutionary Terrorism, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, for example, found welcome refuge in Britain even as they were chased out of other European lands. Even today, Britain remains one of the largest arms-exporting nations in the World, which doesn't exactly contribute to peace.

The objection that may be raised here is that, Ireland, which is situated even further west than Britain and, therefore, furthest away from the Sun of Truth, should be even worse than Britain itself. The fact is that, for centuries, Ireland was (and to some extent still is) dominated by Britain. The center of gravity in the region, therefore, must be admitted to lie in Britain and not in Ireland. Moreover, it is indisputable that Ireland's true Spirituality has long been suppressed by its own clergy as well as left-leaning politicians and intelligentsia. Finally, in the West, even Yoga is used as a means of making money.

By contrast, to the East of India, we find that all countries have, historically speaking, either accepted Hinduism and Buddhism or have developed their own adaptations of the Original Faith (Adi Dharma), such as, Taoism (in China) and Shintoism (Japan). Even those Asian countries that have fallen under the influence of Western Faiths such as Communism (China) or Islam (Indonesia), have on the whole, retained some of the Spiritual balance and sanity that continues to radiate from the original faiths. Japan, which is the easternmost Asian nation, has held out longest against the Western epidemics of Capitalism and Communism.

But the best proof for this is that 99 per cent of the conflict and violence currently raging in the World today is generated by countries that are dominated or otherwise influenced by Western faiths. This is a fact that nobody can deny. The main conflicts that are disrupting World peace today and that may soon develop

into a Global Conflagration, are taking place between Capitalism and Communism and between Christianity and Islam. These conflicts are Western-made and have nothing to do with Eastern culture and religion. On the contrary, if Mankind were wise enough to embrace Eastern faiths, in particular Yoga, the World would be a much safer and more peaceful place!

We therefore invite all human beings on Earth to embrace the teachings of Yoga before it is too late.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 5

ORIGIN OF YOGA

QUESTION: What is the historical basis for the attribution of the origins of Yoga to God Shiva? It has been remarked by some scholars that the Yoga Sutra, one of the earliest works on Yoga, only briefly introduces the concept of God who is moreover not mentioned by name.

ANSWER: Just as the Sun always and already shines regardless of whether people's vision of him is obscured by clouds, darkness or blindness, so also, Yoga - which is the Luminous Expression of the Supreme Consciousness, constantly fills the Universe with its Eternal Light of Truth. Yet because ordinary humans and other un-Enlightened beings are unaware of the Light of Truth - much as a blind man is unaware of the light of the Sun - it remains "underground", buried, as it were, in the innermost recesses of un-Enlightened man's subconscious. This being so, it is the task of a Yoga Master (who is a Master of Spiritual Illumination) to bring this living light to the surface so that they, to whom it belongs, may see it face to face and recognise it as their own true essence.

Authentic Yogic Teaching is a living tradition based on the higher experience of living Masters and its direct transmission to their disciples. Written texts, valuable though they may be, are - by their very nature - more limited in their capacity to transmit Spiritual knowledge, than a living tradition. Even so, confusion regarding the identity of Lord Shiva as World Teacher and Originator of Yoga can only arise if and when: (a) the living tradition is improperly investigated or altogether ignored; (b) scriptural tradition, or isolated fragments of it such as the Yoga Sutra, are examined outside their proper cultural, historical and Spiritual context. A clearer picture emerges when we adopt the Yogic view of reality which is deeper, more complete and, therefore, closer to truth. As the Scriptures say, Yoga can only be known by means of Yoga.

First, the Yoga Sutra, which has been dated to about 180 BC - although it is generally accepted that it contains material going back far before that - is a very concise work dealing mainly with the psycho-philosophical interpretation of Yogic teachings and does not constitute a religious work as such. Second, it contradicts neither the existence of God nor the identity of that God with Shiva. Third, in the Yoga Tradition, out of pious respect and in recognition of Its Inexpressible Nature, the Supreme Being is not given a name but is indirectly referred to by means of some symbolic designation such as "Lord" (Ish, Ishvara), "Master" (Natha), "The Most High" (Anuttara) or simply "He" (Sah). "Shiva" itself is not a proper name like that given to an individual person but a technical term expressing the concept of God, that is, the Universal Being Who - in the experience of Yogis - has the power to help us in our Spiritual effort, hence Shiva (Auspicious, Propitious, Good, Gracious).

This Universal Being is referred to by the author of the Yoga Sutra, Patanjali, simply as Ishvara (Lord, God). However, the fact is that Ishvara - along with Maheshvara (Great Lord) and Parameshvara (Supreme Lord) - is a term commonly used by Shiva's devotees when referring to their God, a fact long recognised by the eminent Dr. Surendranath Dasgupta, Ph.D., in his "History of Indian Philosophy" (1922).

In consequence, we cannot reasonably exclude the possibility that the term "Ishvara" was employed in the same sense by Patanjali himself. Indeed, we may safely assume that this was the case. Moreover, Patanjali

does state that Ishvara (God) is Eternal, he exists beyond time, and as such he is the Primordial Guru (Adi-Guru) of the Ancient Sages. Not only is this in agreement with the Yogic concept of God Shiva, but from a number of reliable sources we happen to know exactly who this Primordial Guru is.

In its overview of the history of Indian religion, the Encyclopedia Britannica states that, "the cult of Shiva emerged first. Shiva alone was called Isha or Ishvara (Lord, God)". Professor M. Eliade's Encyclopedia of Religion states that "In classical Hindu mythology Shiva is generally portrayed as a Yogi who lives on Mount Kailasa in the Himalayas [that is, in Heaven]". While epithets such as Yoga-Isha (Yogेश) and Yoganatha, meaning "Lord of Yoga", are explained as "Names of Shiva" in the Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary. Thus Ishvara's equation with Shiva as Lord of Yoga is common knowledge even in the West at least among the educated classes.

We shall now hear the testimony of the Indian tradition itself. The renowned Yoga Teacher, B. K. S. Iyengar, begins his book, "The Light on Yoga" with the following prayer: "I salute Adishvara (Primeval Lord Shiva) who taught first the science of Hatha Yoga". The great sage of South India, Shri Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950), referred in his teachings to Lord Shiva as Lord of Yoga (Yogaraja) and Primal Master (Adi-Guru, Dakshinamurti, etc.).

The Collection Of Shiva's Sayings (Shiva Samhita), a Yoga manual compiled in about 1700, begins with the words: "I, Ishvara (that is, Lord Shiva), Lover of my devotees and Bestower of Spiritual Freedom on all beings, thus declare the Science of Yoga." The Song Of The Lord (Ishvara Gita of the Kurma Purana), likewise portrays Shiva as the World Teacher Who instructs a group of sages.

In his main work, The Light of the Sacred Scriptures (Tantraloka) Illustrious Master Mahamaheshvara Abhinava Gupta, one of India's most eminent Spiritual authorities (c. 950-1025) belonging to the North Indian Tradition of Shiva, unequivocally acknowledges Shiva as Supreme Lord and Primordial Guru. The South Indian Saint and Philosopher, Shri Shankaracharya (c. 800), who was one of the most influential figures in the history of Indian religion and philosophy, similarly eulogises Lord Shiva as the Supreme Eternal Guru (see Dakshinamurti Stotram, Shivanandalahari, etc.).

In the Natha tradition of the first centuries of the current era and the earlier (about 100 BC), Pashupata tradition, the Primal Lord (Adi-Natha) is likewise identified with God Shiva Who is the Eternal Divine Teacher.

A very important Yogic text from about the same period as the Yoga Sutra - if not earlier - is The Revelation Of The Tremendous Wisdom God (Vijnana Bhairava Tantra) also known as The Secret Instruction In The Wisdom Of Shiva (Shiva Vijnana Upanishad), in which Supreme God Shiva (Parameshvara) in His Tremendous (Bhairava), Darkness-Dispelling Aspect acts as Divine World Teacher.

One of India's oldest Spiritual traditions, that of the Jains, which goes back at least 3,000 years, similarly venerates Adi-Natha as the First Guru. Now since this Guru's symbolic emblem is a Bull, this clearly identifies him with Shiva who has always been associated with the Bull on account of the latter's immemorial symbolism of sheer strength, rain-making abilities and generative power (both "bull" and "rain" in Sanskrit are derived from the root "Vrish", to rain as well as to have manly power).

Indeed, Shiva's symbol has been the Bull (Nandi, Bestower of Bliss) at least from the times of the Indus Valley civilisation. In the hymns of the Rig Veda, Shiva in His aspect of Rudra is addressed by the title of "Bull". Another great Teacher and religious reformer of the Jain tradition is known by the name of Mahavira (Great Hero) - another epithet of Shiva ("Lord of Heroes" is one of Shiva's titles already mentioned in the Vedas).

Indeed, the Hindu Wisdom-Book of Hymns (Rig Veda), dating from the 4th millennium BC, mentions the God of Mystic Fire (Rudra) who is as bright as the Sun and has healing powers: "We pray for joy and health and strength to Rudra, Lord of sacrifice and hymns and balmy medicines. He shines in splendour

like the Sun, refulgent as bright gold is He, the Good, the best among the Gods!" (Ralph T.H. Griffith's translation). Now to heal means to re-unite and make whole, that is to say, precisely the power and function of Shiva in His capacity as Lord of Yoga or Unity. Rudra, of course, remains one of Lord Shiva's sacred names even today.

Moreover, later commentaries on the Wisdom-Books (Vedas) refer to this Luminous Deity as Vratya-Pati, that is, Lord of Ascetics which is another long-established epithet of Shiva. Indeed, since prehistoric times the Sunlike God of Inner Fire has been universally identified with Shiva, the Lord of Yogis and Ascetics and Supreme Healer. Later Scriptures like Shvetashvatara Upanishad (6th century BC) clearly continue this timeless tradition.

Echoes of this tradition may be found in the Great Epic of India, Mahabharata, where the ancient Vedic term Vratya is used in association with certain followers of Shiva. Moreover, in the Mahabharata Lord Shiva plays a central role, in particular, as Spiritual Teacher. Thus that portion of the epic known as Harivamsha Purana, names Sage Durvasas (an Incarnation or Manifestation of Shiva) as Lord Krishna's Spiritual Instructor. Finally, the Mahabharata concludes that "Shiva is Yoga and the Lord of Yoga. He can be approached by Yogis only".

Even the Buddhist tradition acknowledges Lord Shiva as Master of Yoga. Thus according to the Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary, "Maha-Yogin" or "Supreme Yogi" is a "name of Shiva especially when worshipped by Buddhists".

The fact is that an immense scriptural body based on the same fundamental tradition of Shiva as Lord of Yoga has been in circulation for at least as long as the Yoga Sutra and its very existence demonstrates that in most Yoga circles there has never been any doubt regarding the precise identity of the Original Teacher. Although the teachings and practices of Yoga - or aspects thereof - have long been adopted by a number of Yogic and non-Yogic traditions including Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, to this day the vast majority of Yogis continue to follow the Tradition of Shiva (Shiva Agama or Shiva Dharma).

Indeed, as evidenced by countless works of devotional art - both ancient and modern - Shiva is worshipped throughout India as the supreme example of the Archetypal Teacher (Jagad-Guru, World Teacher) per se, not only of Yoga, Enlightenment or Spirituality, but also of innumerable arts and crafts: dance, music, poetry, healing, love (both Spiritual and physical), magic, archery and hunting.

On the whole, therefore, it may be said that, apart from the living tradition itself, there is sufficient scriptural and circumstantial evidence for Shiva's identity as Originator of Yoga to be accepted as conclusively established.

Says Scripture: "In every World Age, Lord Shiva incarnates as Teacher of Yoga (Yogacharya) and propagates its wisdom for the Salvation of His devotees" (Shiva Purana, Vayaviya Samhita I, 32:14; II, 8:43, etc.).

We have thus demonstrated that, while the Yoga Sutra constitutes a valuable introduction to Yogic teachings, the higher truths of Yoga are to be found in the Tradition of Shiva (Shiva Agama) itself which is the true origin of Yoga.

Nevertheless, the cultural and historical factors so far considered can only be of secondary importance belonging as they do to the external domain of conventional knowledge. If we enter the real World of Yoga which is the World of Higher (Inner) Knowledge, we may acquire an even deeper and more accurate understanding of the situation.

First, there are three fundamental forms of Spiritual Revelation or Transmission of Higher Intelligence, which Yoga identifies as accounting for the great diversity of religious and Spiritual traditions in the World:

1. Revelations that are entirely the product, conscious or subconscious, of the individual mind and hence do not count as genuine, properly speaking.
2. Revelations that are genuine transmissions of the Universal Mind but are misinterpreted or misunderstood by the recipient individual or group of individuals.
3. Revelations that are both genuine transmissions of the Universal Mind and are correctly interpreted and understood as such by the recipient individual (or group of individuals).

Although on the relative level they appear to derive from different spatial and temporal points of origin, at the level of non-dual, Unitive Awareness of Yogic Consciousness, all currents of genuine Spiritual Instruction are recognised as emanating from the same Source Intelligence.

In other words, only One Teaching Entity or Guiding Principle (Guru Tattva) is ultimately responsible for all teaching activity.

Not only this, but since all forms of intelligence are generated by, and have their existence in, the same Universal Consciousness, both the Transmitter and recipient of Spiritual Intelligence (or "Teacher" and "learner") are essentially identical as conscious projections of the same One Universal Intelligence. Yoga being, by definition, the Spirituality of absolute non-duality (Advaita) or Unity, this is the only Spiritually true and logically acceptable position.

This Spiritual fact is accurately described in The Revelation Of The Tremendous Freedom God (Svachchanda Bhairava Tantra), compiled in the 5th century CE, which declares: **Eternal God Shiva (Sada Shiva), God Incarnate, manifests Himself as both Master and disciple for the purpose of bringing to the World the Revelation of Truth in the form of questions and answers.**

In other words, Shiva, the Supreme Self instructs the individual self (the human Soul) who is His Own Manifestation into the Yogic Truth of Universal Unity. "In the beginning", says Scripture, "this Universe was Atman (Spirit, Soul) alone; looking around, he saw nothing but Himself." Thus the Lord instructs those whom He wishes to elevate, into the Eternal Truth of the Soul's identity with the Supreme.

The Supreme Instructor (Parama Guru) is one's own Higher Self, the Divine Light shining in one's own heart. For this reason, Scripture declares, "One should worship the Self alone as his true World. Whosoever worships another God (than his own Higher Self), thinking, He is one and I another, knows not. He is like a sacrificial animal for the Gods."

Identity of the human Soul with the Supreme (Shiva-Samata) is the Secret of Yoga, of true Spirituality and of all genuine Faiths.

This also solves another problem that is sometimes raised in this context: how can Shiva or Ishvara, as a Transcendental Intelligence existing outside relative reality, instruct a human being who lives in a world governed by the laws of time and space? The answer is simple enough. Since everything is created by, and has its existence within, the all-inclusive Universal Consciousness, all genuine Spiritual Revelation necessarily takes place on the impulse and through the medium of that very Consciousness Itself.

Indian folklore actually looks upon Patanjali as an Incarnation of Ananta, a Serpent-like Divine Being. Now according to an ancient tradition, Ananta is the name given to an Emanation of Shiva. "Ananta, King of Serpents, is Shiva" - says the Shiva Purana (Vayaviya Samhita, II, 4:47).

In Yogic terms, this means that Ananta is the Serpent-like Stream of Spiritual Intelligence that emerges from the depths of the Infinite Ocean of Consciousness in order to communicate to us a Higher and

previously hidden (or unrecognised) Knowledge, and that Patanjali himself wrote the Yoga Sutra under the inspiration of Ananta, the Emanation of Shiva's Universal Intelligence.

By the same mechanism, the authors of the Vijnana Bhairava Tantra, Ishvara Gita and the rest, composed their respective works which together constitute the many facets of the Infinite Jewel of Yogic Wisdom. This fact is further supported by Shiva's traditional epithet of Nagesha-Natha or Lord of Serpents: as the Universal Consciousness, Shiva is both the Source and Master of all conscious activity, and hence of all Streams of Spiritual Intelligence issuing, serpent-like, that is, with a wave-like movement suggesting vibration or pulsation, from the Ocean of Ultimate Reality.

In terms of Western Psychology - as expounded by Professor Jung - this universal phenomenon may be similarly interpreted as a function of the Collective Unconscious which, in this case, is nothing but the Universal Consciousness (Para-Samvid) of Yogic Psychology, called "Unconscious" because it is largely unconscious or unknown to the Spiritually unaware personal mind.

It might be noted in passing that this concept of a Divine Serpent as mediator of Higher Knowledge is of the greatest anthropological, psychological and Spiritual interest. Thus we find a Celestial Dragon among the Chinese and a Plumed Serpent among the Ancient Mexicans along with the Uraeus Snake of the Egyptian Pharaohs, the Divine Python of the Greeks, the Serpent Lord of the Tree of Truth of Ancient Sumer and last but not least, the Serpent Power (Kundalini Shakti) of Yoga itself, all of which are but various symbolic representations of essentially the same Divine Entity embodying Spiritual Knowledge, Wisdom, or Truth.

Says Scripture: "When everything was neither existent nor non-existent, when it was neither day nor night, Shiva alone existed. From Him the Ancient Wisdom emanated" (Vayaviya Samhita I, 6:39).

Nor must one assume that the Yogis' choice of the term Shiva as a designation for the all-inclusive Universal Intelligence is in any way sectarian, dogmatic or even arbitrary. This important point has been graciously elucidated by the Master of The Yoga Order, Gurudev Shri Soma-Natha Maharaj as follows: the essence of all life is conscious activity (or awareness and movement); life is also essentially good. Indeed, the Sanskrit word Shiva means, first of all, good, benevolent, auspicious. Second, it may be broken down into the phonemes or sound units, Shi and Va. **Shi** (literally, that in which all things lie or rest - from the root "shi", lie, come to rest, reside in) means to support, include, embrace, contain, while **Va** suggests movement. In consequence, **Shiva** designates the All-Including, All-Supporting Living Intelligence Which encompasses or contains everything within Its field of awareness (and therefore knows everything) and by Whose power everything moves. In short, the Supreme Reality Itself.

In our experience, it is a Spiritual fact that all genuine Seekers will sooner or later accept the Universal Consciousness (or World Spirit) as the Original Source of all Spiritual teaching or activity, including Yoga, and it matters little what we choose to call this Source. Thus, Vishnu, Buddha, Yahweh, Allah, Universal Being, Ultimate Reality or any other corresponding designations, must be regarded as equally valid if and to the extent that they are capable of evoking in the Seeker's heart a meaning equivalent, or sufficiently similar to the aforementioned and provided that they are conducive to an understanding among the individuals concerned, of the fact that they all are seeking the same One Truth. (It may be noteworthy that this has enabled people of Spirit all over the World - Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, Pagans and Jews - to recognise the value of Yoga as an inner Spiritual process regardless of their external or official religious allegiance.) The term Shiva has been chosen by us in preference to others first because it constitutes a most apt appellation for the Universal Intelligence or Godhead - as defined above - and second because it is supported by the Yoga Tradition itself.

In the light of these considerations, the Initiation of the Spiritual Process, called Yoga, by God Shiva (the Universal Consciousness) must be admitted to be - both Spiritually and historically speaking - a factual occurrence that no one can logically deny.

However, this must not lead us to lose sight of another fact, namely, that Yoga is not only the Spiritual process whereby the human Soul may re-unite himself with the Universal Being from Whom he has become separated, but also the Universal Unity itself, that is, the Unitive Experience the Universal Being has of Himself as a Unique Undivided Reality.

This Experience of Absolute Unity with Himself which is the Supreme Being's very nature (or natural state) is the highest form of Unity or Yoga.

As such, Yoga has always existed and continues to constitute an Eternal Reality above and beyond the spatial and temporal domain of the material World (see [Yoga - The World's Oldest Faith](#)).

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 6

IMAGE WORSHIP

QUESTION: Does Yoga approve of image worship and, if so, is this not a breach of God's Commandment as given in Holy Scripture (Torah, Bible, Quran, etc.)?

ANSWER: Firstly, Yoga approves of any Spiritual practice or activity that elevates the human Soul and brings him closer to God. This includes the use of symbolic images or objects, in particular for the purpose of contemplation and meditation.

Secondly, why does the enquirer ask about Western Scriptures while leaving out the Scriptures of the East? Surely, an enquiry into truth should be comprehensive and inclusive and not selective and exclusive. Otherwise, he will end up with a distorted result. He should therefore first study the Scriptures of the East, and then ask questions.

Regarding some people's objection to image worship, our reply is as follows. It may be true that God appears to speak against such practices in the Scriptures of the Jews, Christians and Muslims. But it is equally true that in the Hindu Scriptures He prescribes the same as an important means of attaining Unity with Him. In fact, the Scriptures of India describe such forms of worship in great detail. There is no rational basis for accepting one Scripture and discarding another. If Scripture is the Word of God then all Scriptures must be equally worthy of being followed.

Assuredly, God being Truth, cannot err or contradict Himself. Nor can we reasonably believe that God's Revelation to the Prophets of India is in any way inferior to the Revelation given to the Prophets of Israel and Arabia. On reflection, this apparent contradiction proves to be rooted not in Divine Revelation at all, but in the way Scripture has been interpreted by man.

The Creator of the Universe did not create human beings for them to squabble among themselves but to live in Unity and Peace. Lovers of Unity and Peace must, therefore, look for points of agreement between the various faiths of the World and not artificially inflate their apparent differences.

It is a universally recognised fact that the worship of, or reverence shown to, certain images or symbols of the Divine renders the believer more sensitive and receptive to the qualities or attributes of the Divine as represented by or projected on to the object of worship. However, when incorrectly executed, such worship may on occasion result in the worshipper according excessive importance to the image itself and becoming oblivious to the Divine qualities or attributes of which the image was merely supposed to serve as a reminder.

While the former mode of worship must be admitted to be legitimate and commendable in all circumstances, the latter is clearly unacceptable. Since God cannot disapprove of any action that brings man closer to Him, it becomes evident that His prohibition refers exclusively to those forms of worship that alienate rather than bring man closer to God. It is only this last-named form of worship that qualifies as "idol-worship" or "idolatry" in the negative sense of the word. This must be regarded as the only acceptable interpretation of Scriptural injunctions against image worship.

Divine vs. man-made Scriptures

An important problem that arises from the fact that Image Worship is prohibited by some faiths but permitted by others, is whether this difference is due to Divine Revelation or human agency. We have indicated above that God being Ever True, He cannot contradict Himself. Although one of the Biblical Commandments says that man should not make any images of anything that lives in Heaven or in the Water or in the Earth, in another Biblical passage, God commands Moses to make images of Angels!

Most scholars agree that the Bible was edited many times before it reached its present state. There is no way of knowing, therefore, what the original Bible said. What we do know, however, is that Ancient Judaism was distinct in many respects from Modern Judaism. We also know that Ancient Judaism allowed the worship of images and the same applies to all other Ancient Faiths of Europe, Africa, Asia, America and Australia.

The Original Revelation, therefore, seems to have permitted the practice of Image Worship. Indeed, had God wished to prohibit such practices, He wouldn't have allowed them to go on unchecked for millennia. As the prohibition against Image Worship suddenly appeared in just one place on Earth, that is, in Israel, the only logical conclusion is that it didn't come from God but from man, more specifically, from a group of priests who sought to introduce a new religion: Modern Judaism.

To establish the truth of the matter, it will be convenient to first analyse the subject from a scriptural point of view. Thus we find that the Bible (Exodus 20, 5) says: "You shall not bow down to them (other Gods), for I the Lord your God am a jealous God". The problem that arises here is threefold: Who is "You"; who is "they"; who is "I the Lord"? We shall begin with the third, and most important, element of the problem, namely, which God is saying these words? As the Supreme Lord of the Universe, being above ordinary emotional experience, cannot harbour such base sentiments as jealousy, this is clearly not the Supreme God speaking but the God worshipped by the ethnic and religious group known as Israel. Alternatively, it is his priests speaking (or writing) on his behalf.

This is why, at the very beginning of the Biblical Commandments, God expressly addresses the People of Israel, declaring, "I am your God who brought you out of Egypt". The term "other Gods", therefore, can mean nothing else but "Gods worshipped by other nations" and the meaning of the verse must be admitted to be, "You shall not worship foreign Gods". Which makes sense in the context of Jewish faith, without implying a worldwide prohibition as some erroneously believe.

Indeed, the Old Testament's Ten Commandments are expressly regarded as part of God's exclusive covenant with the People of Israel. Now, the term "Israel" or "People of Israel" is likely to have originally designated a small group of people that may more accurately be described as a sect and not as a nation. In consequence, they evidently are intended for a section of the Jewish people and not for the entire human race.

Had God wished to deny the existence of other Gods or prohibit their worship by all of Mankind He would have stated so in the Scriptures of all nations. But He didn't. On the contrary, the worship of various Gods is permitted, even commended, in the Scriptures of the Hindus, Ancient Egyptians, Greeks and other great civilisations past and present. The same applies to Image Worship. It was prohibited not by God but by the Israelite clergy who sought to impose its own creed on the people.

What are "False Gods"?

Another point of controversy that has often been raised in this context is the prohibition against the worship of "false Gods". It should be obvious to all thinking people that such worship would be a rather pointless exercise, unless it were shown to produce results that would justify it. But what if the Gods worshipped were not "false" but quite real?

On being asked whether the Gods really existed, the great Saint of South India, Bhagwan Shri Ramana Maharshi, replied: "If you exist, why should they not exist?". Now this is a question which all thinking people should ask themselves before they look any deeper into the matter. As to the non-thinking ones, well, they will have to wait until God is gracious enough to remove the veil of ignorance from their eyes.

Meanwhile, the fact is that all religions including Christianity and Islam admit the existence of Higher Beings who are manifestations or powers of the Divine. In the West, these are called Angels (Divine Messengers) or Gods. Says the Bible: "God stands in the Congregation of the Mighty; He judges among the Gods" (Psalms 82:1). In India, they are known as Devas (Radiant Ones). Whatever we choose to call these Beings, it is generally accepted that they function as intermediaries between man and God and that these Divine Beings are capable of assuming human or other forms and shapes.

It follows from this that it is not unreasonable to say that these Divine Beings who are endowed with Divine powers may appear to man in *any* form or shape in which case it is legitimate for man to make and honour images that remind him of such manifestations of the Divine and ultimately bring him closer not only to the Gods or Angels but to the Divine Itself. It must be obvious that a person worshipping such an image, far from "worshipping false Gods" does in fact honour and appeal to the Divine power or powers represented by or projected on to the image.

The objection that may be raised here is why should it be necessary to worship *any* beings, whether Divine or not, apart from God or the Supreme Being Himself? Or, to put it in different words, why can humans not worship God directly?

Well, the fact is that man being imperfect he has no direct knowledge or perception of Truth. He needs to get closer to Truth by means of secondary sources. He must read about Truth in Scripture or have Scripture read and expounded to him by a qualified Spiritual guide, human or Divine. The Prophet Mohammad, for example, had the Quran revealed to him not by God directly but through an Angel. Similarly, the teachings of Christianity were not revealed directly by God but through Jesus Christ and the Apostles. Likewise, the Jewish people received their Laws through Moses and other Prophets, and so on.

While there is no suggestion that Angels, Devas or Gods should be worshipped instead of or in preference to the Supreme Being Himself, the fact remains that contact is often more easily established between man and intermediary forms of the Divine than between man and God Himself. If it is legitimate for a Muslim to request guidance from a human mullah (or imam) or for a Christian to solicit guidance from a priest (or vicar), then it must be even more legitimate for a person (Yogi, Hindu, Pagan or otherwise) to seek guidance from an Angel or God.

This, after all, is the very function of Divine Beings: to offer guidance and protection. The expression "Guardian Angel", for example, did not appear out of the blue. It is the equivalent of the earlier "Tutelary Deity" (or Guardian God). The Angels or Gods are our Friends. And honouring them is the appropriate way of soliciting their help. By contrast, being disrespectful towards them and calling them "false Gods" amounts to blasphemy and can only achieve negative results.

Moreover, while it is true that official Hinduism, for example, attributes Divine activities such as Creation, Preservation and Dissolution to various Gods, in practice these are regarded as functions of One Supreme Deity Who is worshipped as such by the believers. Indeed, most Hindu temples are dedicated to one Principal God, although secondary deities may be honoured as well in the same way as Angels and Saints

are honoured in the Christian tradition. Thus even apparently polytheistic faiths are, in practice, monotheistic (see [The Unity Of All Faiths](#)).

For example, in the Hindu Holy Scripture, Shiva Purana (the Ancient Gospel of Shiva) the Gods address Lord Shiva, the Supreme God, with the following words: "O Great Lord! Lord of the Gods! You Alone create, sustain and annihilate the Universe. You are the Supreme Being. We bow to You, the Great Lord, Who are greater than the greatest, the greatest of the great, the All-pervading, Omniformed Lord" (Rudra Samhita II 41, 1-39). Moreover, it is written that, "the worship of Deities other than Lord Shiva is futile [for the purpose of Eternal Salvation]. One should therefore be exclusively devoted to Shiva. For Salvation is easily attained by him who has exclusive and unflinching devotion for Shiva and none other" (Rudra Samhita I 4, 57-58).

What becomes evident from this is that the notion that Eastern Faiths "worship many Gods" is inaccurate and misleading, perhaps even deliberately so. Indeed, Westerners often don't even know their own Scriptures. We can hardly expect them to know the Scriptures of other faiths! Whether these Western misconceptions are propagated knowingly or due to ignorance, the fact remains that they are as false as they can be.

Another thing that becomes clear is that while the Supreme Being is worshipped for the purpose of attaining Salvation, Nirvana or Enlightenment which is man's Highest Goal, other Deities may be approached for material gain, for example. Yet even then, as these Deities are ultimately nothing but the Supreme Being's Own Powers or Manifestations, there cannot be any objection to this, in monotheistic terms.

Indeed, even in Western Faiths, a believer may pray to God in His capacity as "Lord of Mercy", "Lord of Justice", etc., depending on which particular Power or Function of the Deity is being invoked for the attainment of a given favour. Again, the faithful may pray to Saint Christopher, the patron saint of travellers, Saint George, the patron saint of farmers or to any number of Angels for any number of material favours. Spiritual Salvation, on the other hand, remains the domain of the Supreme Being or God both in Western and Eastern Faiths. On reflection, therefore, the charge of "polytheism" does not really hold water.

Eastern Gods vs. Western Angels

Concerning the visual appearance of Gods, it is admitted, even in Western Faiths, that Angels can assume various forms and shapes, just like the Eastern Gods. As man is not in a position to decide what appearance a Divine Being should have, no religion can reasonably claim that the Gods of other faiths are false, merely on the basis of literary or artistic representations: if we accept that a Western Angel can have two pairs of wings, then we must also accept that an Eastern God can have four arms.

As for the myths about the Gods that are sometimes found in Eastern Scriptures, some may be literally true while others are true to the extent that the moral, practical or Spiritual message they seek to convey is true. If Eastern Faiths cannot always prove that their mythological narratives actually took place in a literal sense, neither can Western Faiths prove the authenticity of their own Scriptures.

There is no scientific evidence, for example, that Moses (the reformist prophet of Israel) ever received the Ten Commandments from God; there is no proof that Jesus, the founder of Christianity, ever existed; there is no proof that Mohammad, the prophet of Islam, was inspired by God.

What we can prove, on the basis of historical and archaeological evidence, is that Eastern Faiths have on the whole been more peaceful, more tolerant and wiser, than their Western counterparts. We believe that this in itself suffices to give them the benefit of the doubt.

Image worship is not idolatry

The fact is that soliciting help from a Higher Being may be done either directly or through the medium of a sacred image. For this reason, the Holy Scriptures of India prescribe three means or aids in the worship either of the Supreme Being or secondary Deities: Tantra (Ritual), Yantra (Devotional Images) and Mantra (Sacred Formulas or Mystic Prayers).

As far as Sacred Images are concerned, since the Divine is capable of assuming any form and shape and can manifest Itself everywhere, It can also enter and take possession of a pre-existing object, whether man-made or naturally occurring. If the Spirit of God can enter and make itself known in a man-made church, mosque or temple then it can also enter and make itself known in a man-made image in answer to the believer's prayer.

This is precisely what the Scriptures of India (Agamas, Puranas, Tantras) all are saying. That it is both possible and desirable for images or symbols of the Divine to be made by man and to then appeal to the Divine Power or Spirit to enter and take possession of a material image or symbol in order to enable man to establish a closer contact to the Divine. Since such devices do appear to serve their intended function, Yoga naturally approves of the creation and use of images for the above-stated purposes.

Even if we were to assume, for the sake of argument, that in some cases the Divine failed to manifest Itself in or through a man-made object, the worship of holy images can still not be rejected as a pointless activity in the same way as the construction of churches or mosques cannot be deemed pointless merely because some of the worshippers who attend such places fail to experience the Divine. What is the purpose of building churches and mosques if not to concentrate the worshipper's mind on the presence of God? The same function may be equally performed by an image or symbolic object.

The fact is that so long as a believer has no direct perception of God he can only worship a concept or mental *image* of God. It is irrelevant whether this image is mental or physical. If our opponents object that they worship God as described in Scripture, we reply that firstly, even a description of something is not the actual thing but merely an image thereof and, secondly, Yogis and Hindus also worship God as described in *their* Scripture, namely in His Visible Manifestation or Form.

We have thus established, on the basis of Scriptural and factual evidence as well as through logical argumentation, (1) that the Divine Spirit has the capacity of descending into the physical World and entering a consecrated object or space and (2) that contact with the Divine may, and upon failure of other means must, be established through the medium of a special object such as a sacred image. We shall now address the issue of image worship from the perspective of the worshipper himself.

When correctly understood, "Image worship" is suddenly seen as a beautiful expression of love of the Divine. To clarify this point we may use an illustration from daily life. Let us suppose that a young man were in love with a girl and wished to express his love for her by offering her a bunch of flowers. However, because he is too shy or because the girl's parents would object, the young man is compelled to leave the flowers on the girl's doorstep. Now, although the flowers are left outside the door, they are clearly not meant for the door but for the girl who lives in the house behind the door. Similarly, the Yogi, Hindu or Buddhist devotee who appears to offer flowers, incense, candles and other such things to an Idol or Image (Murti) of God, in reality directs his worship to the Deity represented by the Image and upon Whom the Image helps to concentrate the worshipper's mind.

In the same way as a bunch of flowers given to the person one loves is an expression of love or Unity between two Souls, an object offered to an Image of the Divine is an expression of union, communion or Unity of the worshipper with the Deity worshipped through the medium of the Image. On a higher level, the offering itself stands for a part of oneself which is offered to the Deity represented by the Image. It is an expression of the recognition of the fact that everything, including oneself belongs, and is offered in worship, to the Deity Who is one's Higher Self.

This Spiritual awareness is beautifully expressed in the traditional saying: "Shiva (God) is the Worshipped One as well as the worshipper and the (object offered in) worship; indeed, Shiva is everything that is. I myself (the Divine Spirit within me) am no other but that very Shiva Himself".

The colour and perfume of flowers, the sound of cimbals, conches and sacred chants, the beauty of the Divine Image, everything in Eastern Ritual has the purpose of opening the devotee's heart so he can come closer to God and become One with Him. Says Mahamaheshvara Abhinava Gupta: "To attain the essence of true worship, let the devotee do obeisance with perfumed flowers that spontaneously penetrate his heart, etc." (Paratrimshika Laghuvritti 32).

What becomes evident is that far from constituting an act of ignorance, "Image worship" is a beautiful, deeply human and highly Spiritual gesture: a very simple and powerful means of establishing Unity with God with Whom the human Soul is essentially One. In other words, a gesture that only an ignorant person can condemn or deny. Indeed, while fundamentalist Judaism and Islam reject the worship of Images as "Idolatry", Christianity (both Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox) has long adopted the Hindu (or Pagan) practice of employing symbolic imagery in the worship of the Divine. The reason for this is easy to see: in a World where most people were illiterate, an Image was much more expressive than a book. Even today, it remains a fact that no amount of literary description can match what we see with our own eyes.

Written words have neither the immediacy nor the suggestive power of sensory perception. While words have to be processed by the mind, Images speak directly to our heart. A statue holding a trident or sword, or one smiling down on us, for example, can perfectly well convey God's power of Justice, Truth or Compassion to the believer. Likewise, an Image that embodies all characteristics of physical beauty can immediately open the worshipper's heart to the Beauty of God. Since God Himself has given man the power of artistic expression it cannot be wrong for man to utilise it in whatever manner he sees fit for the purpose of coming closer to God. To prevent him, on spurious ideological grounds, from doing so is a crime against Humanity and against God. The suppression of religious experience and expression can have no place in the civilised World.

Indeed, what is the purpose of Religion (any Religion) if not to bring us closer to God? And how can we get closer to the Perfect One if not by shedding our imperfections and put on the Perfection of God? And how can we put on the Perfection of God if not by cultivating Divine Qualities within us? And how can we cultivate what is good, what is beautiful, what is real in us, if not by holding before us objects that evoke in us feelings and thoughts that are conducive to the increase of Perfection in us? In Yoga, therefore, we do not worship Images but Divine Qualities reflected in an Image, just as at other times we worship the Divine Qualities we perceive in Nature, in people, or read about in the Scriptures.

Image worship in Western Faiths

We know from the older portion of the Bible (Old Testament) that the Ancient Temple at Jerusalem contained statues of Angelic Beings (Cherubim). Since such statues can hardly be supposed to have been placed there for decorative purposes, we may reasonably deduce from this that the worship of sacred images was permitted in Ancient Judaism, even after the iconoclastic reforms which are thought by some to have been introduced by Moses (about 1200 BC).

Indeed, archaeological and historical evidence has conclusively shown that Pagan (pre-biblical) beliefs and practices in the Middle East were very similar to the sacred tradition of Ancient India and Egypt, and that they continued to exist in the area for a long time. Betlehem, the supposed birthplace of Jesus, for example, was such a centre of the Old Faith - which venerated Lord Adon (or Baal) and his consort, Asherah. A similar focus of the Ancient Religion survived in Syria (at Aphaca or Afqa) until its destruction by the Christian Emperor Constantine. In Israel proper, the evidence similarly proves the worship of Yahweh and Asherah.

What becomes evident is that we are dealing with two forms of Judaism. An ancient, more inclusive one, in which the worship of sacred images was permitted and a more recent, more exclusive and rigid one, that prohibits such worship. In our view, the more ancient version of Judaism was closer to the Eastern Faiths and, therefore, to the World Faith which was the Original Revelation (Adi Dharma) imparted to Humanity by God at the beginning of time.

In the Original Revelation, which was the Universal World Faith, the Supreme Lord established one of the principal pillars of the True Faith, which is Freedom of Worship. Thus, in the Scriptures of the East, the Lord declares: "In whatever manner My devotee worships Me with devotion, that worship is dear to Me" (Bhagavat Gita).

Two forms of worship are permitted in the East: worship of God as a Transcendental, Formless, Unmanifest Being; and worship of God as a Personal Being with Form. The worship itself may be done in two ways: by means of an image such as a geometrical design, statue, etc.; or without the help of such image.

The reason why sacred images are used is not difficult to see: if the human mind is allowed to form its own, mental image of God, it will invariably invent one that may be a far cry away from the Divine Original and mislead the worshipper in his beliefs and actions. This is why in Western Religions, where the use of sacred images is suppressed, there is a higher incidence of mental imbalance, religious intolerance, "holy wars", etc., than in their Eastern counterparts.

A traditional image therefore, which is made in accordance with time-honoured Spiritual principles, serves as a support which stimulates the mind's thoughts and feelings in the right direction and prepares it for a direct experience of God either in this life or in the hereafter. For this reason, Dharmic Faiths such as Yoga, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc., recommend the worship of visible images of the Divine which, in the more advanced stages of Spiritual practice, is replaced by worship of the Unseen Aspects of God.

These incontrovertible Spiritual facts formed the basis for the Divine Commandments which were revealed by the Supreme Lord in the Holy Land of India and broadcast to the four corners of the Earth by His Messengers, the Yogis and God-Seers (Rishis) of old. For this reason, the Kings of Judah, who were following the Commandments of the Original Revelation, appointed priests to perform religious worship in accordance with Divine Command.

Says the Bible: "And they made images of two calves, and made an idol, and worshipped all the Host of Heaven, and served Baal" (2 Kings 17:16). In India, one of the few nations on Earth that has remained faithful to God's Original Revelation, we may find the same elements of worship even today.

Concerning the calf or bull as a symbol of Divine Power, we may observe that, in the Middle East, God Baal was depicted as standing on the back of a bull just as, in India, Lord Shiva is shown as sitting or riding on a bull. Before temples of Shiva, there stands an image of Nandi, the Heavenly Bull symbolic of Divine Power and Sacred Law. Says the Shiva Mahapurana: "The Bull of Dharma is the embodiment of Truthfulness, Steadfastness, Forbearance, Faith, Restraint" etc. (Vidyeshvara Sam. 17, 85-86).

This is why the Sacred Bull of Heaven is said to be the Vehicle (Vahana) of God. Because it is the medium that leads us to God Himself. The World was created as a manifestation of God so that man may know His Majesty and Glory. Therefore through the contemplation of sacred images situated outside the House of God, we become familiar with God's own Attributes that we may recognise them when we see Him face to face. While within the temple itself, there is an Image or Symbol (Lingam, Murti) of the Supreme Lord surrounded by images of various Deities representing the Host of Heaven, that is, the Assembly or Congregation of Divine Beings over which presides the Supreme Lord Himself.

One of Shiva's Divine Titles is Gana-Pati (Lord of the Congregation of Spiritual Beings, Lord of the Heavenly Host). He is also known as Balin (Lord, Supreme Chief, Mighty One), Maha Bala (Supreme

Power), etc., from Sanskrit Bala (Power). The Hebrew word El and Arabic Allah (God) are also derived from the same Sanskrit word, Bala.

Indeed, in the Original Tradition of India, God (Shiva) is surrounded in particular by female Deities and Spiritual Beings (Yoginis) with supernatural powers. This Multitude of Divine Powers (Devi-Gana or Yogini-Gana) is collectively known as Aishvarya (Lordliness, Majesty) and is personified as Goddess Ishvari who is none other than God's Own Power. Thus God, the Supreme Principle of Goodness (Shiva-Tattva) is the Supreme Power Holder (Balin) or Lord (Ishvara) and His Power is His Lordship or Majesty (Aishvarya). In Ancient Middle East this was translated into the worship of God Baal and his Consort Asherah.

Each of these Divine Aspects was symbolically represented by certain religious images in Canaan (Ancient Israel) just as in Ancient India. Thus the Lord was represented by a stone pillar while the Lord's Divine Power was represented by a wooden one. The stone stands for the "Male" Immutable, World-Supporting Supreme Principle. The wooden pole symbolises the "Female" Tree of Life, the Ever-Changing, Ever-Creating Power of the Divine.

All Holy Scriptures of India, Vedas, Puranas, Mahabharata, mention the World-supporting Pillar of Heaven, the Axis or Centre of the Universe (Dhruva, Skambha, Stambha) round which everything revolves. The eminent historian of religion, Professor Mircea Eliade, writes: "To know the Stambha, the Dhruva, is to possess the key to the Cosmic Mystery and to find the 'Centre of the World' in the innermost depths of one's being" (Yoga - Immortality and Freedom).

The special appeal of such timeless images consists in their power to open the doors of our hearts (the gateways to our subconscious, in psychological terms) bringing us closer to a direct experience of God.

Indeed, in India, God has been symbolically represented by a pillar (Lingam) of stone, clay, metal, etc., from prehistoric times down to this day. His Power or "Female" Counterpart, has similarly been associated with trees and vegetation. Of particular importance is the Bilva tree (Bael tree, Aegle Marmelos), the leaves of which, in the Shaiva ritual are placed upon the Shiva-pillar (Shiva-lingam) just as in Ancient Europe wreaths of laurel (or bay-leaves) were placed on similar images of the Deity and maypoles are decked with flowers and green wreaths even today.

Apart from its well-known medicinal properties, the sacredness of the Bilva tree is acknowledged in the Holy Scriptures of India. Thus the Shiva Purana praises the merits of reading the Scriptures in a temple built in a grove of Bilva trees.

Moreover, it is written: "The Bilva tree is a symbol of Lord Shiva. It is worshipped even by the Gods. Its greatness is difficult to fathom... He who worships the Supreme God in the form of a Sacred Pillar (Shiva-lingam) at the root of a Bilva tree becomes a purified Soul: he shall assuredly attain God" (Vidyeshvara Samhita 22, 22-24).

Similarly, the sacred symbol of Judaism, the seven-armed candle stick (Menorah) was originally fashioned in the shape of an almond tree which was sacred to Lord Baal. Says the Bible: "And he (Bezaleel of the tribe of Judah) made the candlestick of pure gold, with bowls after the fashion of almonds, etc." (Exodus 37, 17-19).

Not only the Sacred Tree but its connection with light is itself of Eastern origin. Thus the Holy Scriptures of India (Rig Veda, etc.) which are generally accepted as predating the Western Bible, speak of Seven Suns or Aspects of Divine Light, each inhabiting its own heaven; the Divine Fire (Agni) is said to have Seven Flames, etc.

In Christianity there is the Christmass tree - or, for that matter, the wooden cross - again, a symbol of the Ancient Faith. In Islam, there is the Tree of Paradise (Tree of Life) and even the sacred Black Stone revered

by worshippers at Mecca since Pagan times. In the light of these patent facts it becomes impossible to deny the common origin of all faiths, irrespective of the sectarian propaganda of modern religions.

Another symbol that Baal has in common with Lord Shiva is the thunderbolt he holds in his hand just as Shiva holds the Effulgent Trident of Divine Powers (Trishula). Thus the two Deities share sufficient common attributes for us to safely regard them as identical. The Spiritual practices connected with God Baal may not have been identical in all respects with those of Lord Shiva, but the core teachings must have been essentially the same.

The Ancient Hebrews, the ancestors of the Jewish people, are said to have originated in Mesopotamia (Ancient Babylon), a country whose religion and culture were very much similar to those of Canaan. Says the Bible: "The Babylons had an idol, called Bel (Baal)". Now the Hebrews appear to have been more a pastoralist culture as opposed to the agriculturalist inhabitants of Canaan. This must have resulted in some differences and conflicts which are reflected in Biblical accounts.

As far as their religions are concerned, however, the evidence is that they were identical to all other faiths throughout West Asia. The main difference was the use of distinct titles to describe the Deity: for example, Hebrew Yahweh as opposed to Canaanite Baal, etc. The religion of West Asia was in turn identical to that of South Asia (India). What becomes evident, is that the Ancient Kings of Judah, far from worshipping "foreign Gods" were faithful followers of the Supreme Eternal Law which was the Universal World Order revealed to Humanity by God.

In consequence, the Eternal Tradition of Shiva (Shiva Dharma) must be admitted to be the original and true religion of Israel and Palestine. If both Israelis and Palestinians accepted this fact, they would immediately embrace their ancestral heritage and recognise each other as brothers in the true faith. This would represent an invaluable step towards World Peace and Unity! Which proves that the Original Faith alone can save Mankind from war and destruction.

Modern Judaism, on the other hand, which we may more accurately term Mosaism, Yahwism or Israelism, is a deviation from the Original Faith and must have originally been limited to certain priestly circles only, gaining prominence and authority at a later point, perhaps when large sections of the population were displaced due to conflicts with foreign powers and other factors resulting in a weakening of the original religious leadership. This deviation from the Original Faith was subsequently adopted by later Western Faiths, Christianity and Islam, and reinterpreted in their own favour.

Thus the Israelists, having rejected the Ancient Faith, found their own religion rejected by Christianity, and Christians found their own rejected by Islam! Islam in turn is being torn apart by mutually-rejecting factions within itself, when it is not suppressed by other rejectionist cults like Atheism.

What becomes obvious is that this self-perpetuating, divisive chain of cultural and religious Rejectionism can only be broken, and the World allowed to return to its Original Peace and Unity, by embracing the all-inclusive, all-tolerant and unitive Vision of Yoga which is the Parent Faith of all faiths and the True Faith of Man.

Nor is there any evidence to support the belief that the transition from Ancient to Modern Judaism has in any way improved the situation of the Jewish people. It is written in the Bible itself that so long as the inhabitants of Israel adhered to their original religion, "they had plenty of food and were well and saw no evil" but since they abandoned the faith of their forefathers they "have wanted all things and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine" (Jeremiah 44:17, 18). Indeed, upon the ruins of the Holy Temple at Jerusalem there now stands a monument to another, even more recent and more rigid faith. As things stand, there is no hope of the Temple being rebuilt in the foreseeable future, as the nation of Israel is struggling to survive. In consequence, contrary to official opinion, the abandoning of the original forms of worship may not have been the wisest decision in the history of the Jewish people.

Christian tradition itself seems to have inherited the divisionist dichotomy of its mother faith, Judaism. While the vast majority of Christians (comparable to the Adonist or Baalist common people in the Ancient Land of Judah) has no problem with the use of images, a small yet influential section (comparable to the Jahwist or Israelist elite) rejects the use of the same as "idolatry".

Interestingly, the ancestry of Jesus is traced back to the kings of Judah who, as we have shown, approved of the use of images in religious ritual. So, at least in this respect, Christianity is not so wrong, after all. Indeed, if we read the Bible, we will be amazed at how many Yogic teachings we find there!

Jesus himself declares: "Think not that I have come to destroy the Law (that is, the Dharma), or the Prophets (Rishis). I have come not to destroy but to fulfil them" (Matthew 5, 17).

It is noteworthy that an Early-Christian legend - which was later suppressed by the official Church - informs us that following his recovery from crucifixion, Jesus travelled to India where he died at an advanced age. In consequence, he didn't "ascend to Heaven" as the official story goes - unless we equate India with Heaven. Indeed, the North Indian Valley of Kashmir, where Jesus is said to have been buried, is often referred to as "Heaven on Earth".

Irrespective of the historical merit of this account, we cannot ignore the connections between Early Christianity and the timeless Spirituality of India. Indeed, historical evidence shows that Indian sages were present in the Middle East both before and after Jesus (from about 300 BC to 800 CE). Yogic teachings, therefore must have been familiar to the Spiritual leaders of the Middle East.

Moreover, if Sufi saints like the 9th century Persian mystic and poet Mansur-al-Halaj travelled to India in search of Spiritual knowledge, why not Jesus nine centuries earlier? Millions of people from all over the World are still making this life-transforming journey to the Holy Land of India, even today. It would have been a natural reaction, for a man who failed in his attempt to bring his people back to the Original Faith (Adi Dharma), to retire from public life and devote himself to Spiritual studies in India, the Homeland of Spirituality on Earth.

In consequence, the questions that we must raise here, and that genuine scholars have a duty to investigate, are the following: Could it be that the true intention of Jesus was to re-establish the Ancient Faith (Adi Dharma) of the Kings of Judah and Israel from whom he was descended? Was this the reason why he was so fiercely opposed by the ruling priests? After all, if Jesus was the Son of God (or even an Incarnation or Prophet of God), he could hardly have rejected the Original Faith that God Himself had previously revealed to Mankind in the Scriptures of the East. How else can we explain the fact that image worship was adopted by the Christian Church from the very start?

Freedom of Worship

Writing in defence of Image Worship, the 4th century Christian Saint, Basil of Caesarea, says: "The honour given unto an Image passes over to that which the Image represents" (De Spiritu Sancto). Saint John of Damascus (8th century) also says: "Therefore, when we bow down and worship (an Image of God), we do not worship the material, but that which is represented by the material" (Exposition of the Right Faith).

Moreover, in On Holy Images, he declares, "I will not cease from honouring that material Image which works my Salvation". Similarly, the Stavachintamani (21) declares: "O Omnipotent One! by what path can You not be reached, and by what name can You not be called? By what meditation are You not meditated upon? And again, what is there that You are not?". And in the Shiva Stotravali, the great Kashmiri Saint and poet, Utpaladeva exclaims: "Obeisance to You, O Radiant One! Who can be worshiped in any manner, in any place, in whatever form at all" (2:20).

Moreover, do not the followers of Judaism pray before the Temple Wall at Jerusalem? Do not the followers of Islam walk round, kneel down, pray before, as well as touch or kiss the Black Stone at Mecca? Nobody accuses them of worshipping a wall or a stone. Therefore, nor should Yogis and Hindus be accused of worshipping an image when they perform similar or identical actions before an Image of God. After all, what is right for a Muslim or Jew must also be right for a Yogi or Hindu.

Superficially speaking, there appears to be no connection whatsoever between a physical object such as image or symbol and God, except in the believer's mind. However, the same may be said of a holy book: it is only when we have learned the language and alphabet in which it is written that we begin to understand that it is about God or even a record of God's Own Word. Likewise, on reflection, we begin to understand that certain properties of an image reflect the Beauty, Order and Power of God.

If the opponent objects that a holy book like the Torah or the Quran *is* the Word of God, we reply that a Hindu Holy Book is likewise the Word of God. And in such a book, for example, the Shiva Mahapurana, God clearly declares that image worship is permitted as a service to God and as a means of bringing the worshipper closer to Him. Moreover, since all religions admit that everything comes from God, an image must also derive from the same Divine Source. The image therefore must be admitted to be capable of leading us to God in the same way as a lamp that glimmers in the distance on a dark night is capable of leading us to a human habitation where we may find help, shelter and protection.

Indeed, every worshipper is entitled to worship God according to whatever method he finds most suitable to himself. As different worshippers are on different stages of Spiritual development, there must also be different stages of practice. The first stages of Yoga Practice (Sadhana) - including what may be termed "image worship" or meditation on Spiritual symbols - may be compared to when we cannot directly perceive anything but feel that there is something in the air and consciously gather our thoughts in an endeavour to make out what it is; the second, to when we can hear the distant sound of thunder after which the Sky becomes covered in dark clouds; and the third, to when there is a sudden downpour of rain that drenches us to the bone. When the thunderstorm has passed, we find ourselves bathed in the glorious radiance of the blazing Sun and as we eagerly soak in his light and his warmth, we become one with that source of light and our individuality dissolves in an extraordinary experience of oneness.

As a result of this Spiritual Union of man and God, the human heart which is, by definition, limited, opaque, scattered, twisted, disorientated and extremely fragile, feeble and confused, is one day ambushed and taken by surprise and, being utterly deprived of any possibility whatever to resist or escape, it is seized, penetrated, invaded and inundated from within and without and at the same time transfigured, illumined, clarified, unified, empowered, magnified and cosmified, that is, expanded to cosmic dimensions, and therefore totally, absolutely, immediately, permanently and irrevocably Deified, that is, Made One With God.

Thus it is written: "They who are drenched by the downpour of the nectar-like worship of Shiva's Name are not distressed in the midst of the conflagration of worldly existence... We bow to You, O Great Lord! Whose Greatness cannot be surpassed, Whose Power the fools confounded by their selfish mind can never realise" (Shiva Purana, Rudra Samhita I 4, 54 ;II 15, 66).

The great Saint and poet, Bhattanarayana of Kashmir likewise sings: "Glory to the shower of Divine Nectar caused by the power of Union with the Supreme (Shaiva-Yoga), which permanently washes away the impurities of ignorance, delusion and wordly activities!"..."O Wonder! Even when perceived in a painting or conceived in a dream, You bestow, O Lord, the perfect fruit of Absolute Reality" (Stavachintamani 76, 96).

It is beyond dispute that chanting the Name of God, reading about God from Scripture or honouring Images of God, connects us, in thought and feeling, with God. To the extent that they bring us closer to God, none of these actions can be wrong. On the contrary, they are perfectly legitimate and highly commendable as

we can see on the evidence of Eastern Scriptures and the living testimony of the Saints and Prophets of India.

This in short is the ultimate function of Yoga and of all true religious effort, including Image Worship: to unify our entire being and to restore the state of Unity between ourselves and the Supreme Being, which Unity has been interrupted and disturbed by a divisive and rejectionist perspective of Life. We have thus clearly refuted the opponent's position and exposed his objections as being entirely the product of his own ignorance and Spiritual inadequacy.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 7

ENLIGHTENMENT

QUESTION: What is Enlightenment?

ANSWER: As the word itself implies, Enlightenment is about **Light**. Writing in the third century of the current era (CE) the Christian Saint Hippolytus of Rome says: "There are some among the Indians who say that **God is Light**, not like the light one sees, nor like the Sun or fire, but like the Light of Knowledge whereby the secret mysteries of Nature are perceived by the Wise" (Philosophumena XXI- The Brahmins).

Of course, Indian Yogis are not alone in saying that God is Light. Says the Bible: "God is Light and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John, 1:5). Long before the Bible was written, God was worshipped among many nations on Earth as Light in its various manifestations of fire, lightning, sunlight, etc. Indeed, God was known throughout the Ancient World by different titles which denoted Light such as Dyaus, Deva, Deus. This Supreme Light is the **Light of Consciousness**. It is the Power whereby all living beings know, perceive, think and live their life. In short, the Light of God is the Life Force of the Universe. **Enlightenment** is the condition or state of living in the Light of the Supreme.

In the same way as sunlight descends to Earth where it is absorbed by plants and converted into green leaves, so also in Creation, the Supreme Radiance of God (the Light of Consciousness) becomes more and more obscure as it descends into material existence and finally manifests itself as solid, physical objects that are devoid of their original brightness.

The process of Enlightenment or Illumination is the activity whereby embodied Consciousness returns to its original state of boundless radiance. An inkling of what constitutes this return to the original condition of Light may be gathered from Shri Somananda's writings: "God appears to, or is perceived by, each Soul according to his individual development and Spiritual receptivity. Yet at the same time He remains eternally the same Infinite, Unlimited and Unqualified Reality. Therefore, though God may at times descend into our small World and appear to us in visions and dreams, His true intention remains to elevate us to Higher Planes of Existence where we really belong to, because *That* is our True Home.

"One day, I had just finished my Spiritual practices and was standing before an Image of Shiva, when suddenly a huge wave of energy hit me from behind blowing my heart and body-centred being to pieces - or this is what it felt like - and lifted me up into an infinite Sphere of Dazzling Light. The whole World seemed to have disappeared without trace. Even my physical body had gone and all that was left of it was a barely perceptible feeling that it was still there somewhere in the remotest corner of my life, like a bar of soap that slips out of your hand in a bubble bath or an object dropped in the dark which must logically be still there but escapes entirely your faculties of perception.

"This faintest of feelings was my only link with habitual reality, quietly following into oblivion body, World and all. The same feeling was also what subsequently was to remind me of the fact that my work on

Earth was not yet done. But in the meantime, I was a Light in a Sea of Light, a Flame in a Sea of Flames and nothing else mattered. The practice of Yoga had already brought many wonderful changes to my life but this was truly beyond my dreams... Gradually I took conscious possession of my body again that, as if by a miracle, was still standing there - as if nothing had happened".

This Elevation to the Luminous World of Spirit is described in the Scriptures of the West as "being baptised with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Bible, Matt. 3:11). Having received this True Baptism which is Immersion in the Light of God and Communion with the Supreme Radiance of Consciousness, the Awakened Soul must next realise that the Whole Universe is the Manifestation of that Infinite Glory. It is on the basis of this Supreme Spiritual Realisation that a Soul becomes Fully Enlightened and truly Divine, that is, in full possession of Omniscience and Omnipotence.

A being who has attained this state is called **Enlightened** or **Awakened (Buddha)**. Enlightened Beings occupy various positions in the Universe according to the degree of Enlightenment or Awakening they have attained. Thus they may enjoy the state of a Buddha (Awakened One), Prabuddha (Well-Awakened) or Suprabuddha (Fully Awakened). However, whichever degree of Enlightenment they have attained, they all are clearly distinguishable from the unawakened Souls (Abuddha) by certain unmistakable signs or powers which qualify them as Enlightened Beings.

It will be remembered that Enlightenment is the condition of being in the Light of God. In that condition "there is no darkness", that is to say, there is no shadow of doubt, ignorance, weakness or fear. A Fully Enlightened being is truly omniscient and omnipotent. An Enlightened Yogi, that is, a being who lives in Unity with the Supreme will therefore have the following characteristics:

1. He will have unlimited Knowledge and Power which he will use in absolute Unity and Harmony with Universal Will.
2. He will be immortal and fearless.
3. He will be always aware of the Supreme Truth and never deviate from the Truth as laid down in the Original Scriptures.
4. He will have thorough knowledge and understanding of all Scriptures.
5. He will speak and understand all languages.
6. He will have the powers of clairvoyance, telepathy, etc.
7. He will have control over all elements.
8. He will be able to assume any shape or form and travel to any place and distance in time and space.
9. He will need no food though he may occasionally consume human food if he so chooses.
10. He will be able to elevate other Souls to his own status and power.

These, in short, are the main characteristics of an Enlightened Yogi as described in the Scriptures. A person who does not present even one of the above traits cannot qualify as Enlightened, properly speaking. Apart from the absence of these characteristics, there are two signs whereby impostors may be immediately recognised: 1) They will claim to be introducing a new faith on spurious grounds such as "Truth must change according to new realities", "Consciousness evolves hence a new Revelation is needed", etc. Truth, of course, cannot be changed to fit man-made realities but man must adapt himself to Truth. Nor does the Universal Consciousness "evolve" but man must learn to live in Unity with It. This he can only do by

following the Original and Eternal Revelation. And 2), contrary to what one might have expected had they been rooted in higher inspiration or revelation, their teachings are never spontaneous but the product of their own or others' thought constructs.

A Fully Enlightened Yogi, on the other hand, will always adhere to the Truth as revealed in the Scriptures. Indeed, he will exhibit all ten characteristics plus another two: he will always be compassionate towards other beings and he will abide in a perpetual state of bliss.

The objection that is often raised at this point is why does not an Enlightened Yogi, who is omnipotent, compassionate and can elevate others, remove all the suffering in the World? To this we reply that, as a being who lives in absolute Unity and Harmony with the Supreme, an Enlightened Yogi will never engage in any actions that are contrary to Universal Law (Dharma). If a Soul is meant to undergo certain experiences, however painful, according to Karma, Divine Will or Universal Law, then it will happen exactly as it is meant to happen. Suffering in any case is temporary when compared to the eternity of the Soul, it affects solely the body and the mind, never the Soul himself, and serves the purpose of making man stronger, wiser, more humble or whatever correction is needed for the ultimate perfection of the Soul. What must be beyond doubt is that Enlightened Yogis do help other Souls when and to the extent that help is required or permitted according to Universal Law, with or without the knowledge of the person or persons concerned. It is, after all, due to this very fact that Enlightened Yogis have been held in the highest esteem by common people from the beginning of human life on Earth down to the present day.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 8

YOGA AND PSYCHOLOGY

QUESTION: In what way is Western Psychology related to Yoga?

ANSWER: This is an interesting yet highly complex topic that requires not only a thorough understanding of Psychology but also considerable knowledge of European history. Before embarking on a more detailed discussion, a clear definition of the term Psychology will go a long way in elucidating the issue. In conventional language, Psychology is held to be the study (Logia) of the mind (Psyche) and mental processes. In our view, this definition is unsatisfactory for a number of reasons, only two of which need to concern us here.

First, the mind, that is, the faculty of thinking, feeling and perceiving, has no independent existence of its own, being in fact a function of the Soul. Any systematic study of the mind that excludes the Soul is necessarily incomplete, potentially misleading and hence fundamentally flawed.

The fact is that the Greek word Psyche which forms the basis of the term Psychology, means not only mind but also Soul. The Soul is the conscious entity at the heart of our being. It is that part of us which provides us with awareness and understanding and continues to exist even after the death of the physical body. Since the original founders of Psychology accepted the reality of the Soul as defined above, the original and true Psychology is, by definition, that branch of knowledge which concerns itself with the Soul and its mental functions. After all, just as it is meaningless to analyse the movements of a motor car or any other vehicle without reference to its driver, the mind cannot be properly known or understood so long as one remains incognizant of the Soul. On the other hand, if the Soul is known, the mind is necessarily also known.

Second, as Psychology has a practical application based on knowledge of the Soul (and its mental functions) and not just on the study thereof, it may be appropriately termed Science. It follows from this, that Psychology properly speaking is the Science of the conscious Soul - or Science of Consciousness as Professor Jung put it. It is the knowledge of how consciousness experiences, and interacts with, the World

and, in the final analysis, how consciousness experiences and relates to itself: in other words, Self-Knowledge or Self-Realisation which, as we know, is the very essence of Yoga.

The clarification of this point is particularly important in view of the fact that it has been a source of confusion and a major obstacle in the understanding of both Yoga and Psychology even among Indian scholars with modern academic training. The fact is that any form of Psychology that is not based on knowledge of the conscious Soul (or consciousness) is not proper Psychology. Thus the correct Hindi term for true Psychology should be not *Mano-Vijnana* (Mind-Knowledge) but *Atma-Jnana* (Soul-Knowledge) which is a long-established synonym for Yoga. Likewise, genuine Yogis who are traditionally known by the various synonymous appellations of *Atma-Vid*, *Atma-Jnani* (Knowers of the Soul), or *Jnaneshvara* (Masters of Spiritual Knowledge), are the original and true Psychologists and Doctors of the Soul.

While this may come as a shock to those familiar exclusively with the conventional concept of Psychology, from a Yogic perspective Yoga and Psychology are essentially identical. This fact will become evident if we briefly examine the historical connections between the two systems.

Western Psychology as we know it today, has its origins in the natural reaction to the growing materialism of the 18th and 19th centuries that followed a long millennium of religious authoritarianism and oppression. Deprived of a Spiritual experience of life, the human heart was longing for an alternative to the theology-centred dogma of the Christian Church on one hand and the Soul-less theories of Science, on the other.

It is important to remember that it all had started with the rise of Bible-based faiths during the Middle Ages (known as the Dark Ages of human history) in particular the period beginning with the disintegration of the Roman Empire in the 4th century up to the 8th century when Europe was unnecessarily - and often forcibly - converted to Christianity while much of Asia fell under Muslim military occupation. This in itself created an artificial division between the two continents which for millennia had formed a geographical, cultural and Spiritual unity.

Moreover, through their Middle-East-oriented worldview, the new religions aimed to eliminate all reference to people's Ancestral Spirituality. Nations which had been at home in Europe from earliest prehistory were suddenly requested to regard themselves as descendants of Abraham and Moses - no less - and to adopt the State-sponsored beliefs and practices of some obscure Middle-Eastern sect with a disturbing ambition for World domination. To make matters worse, all aspects of everyday life were controlled to the smallest detail by the religious authorities who expected people to dedicate their lives exclusively to the edification of the Church.

Needless to say, this absurd disregard of historical, Spiritual and psychological realities, which was contrary to the natural instincts of the people, could hardly be conducive to mental and emotional health. It was in fact directly responsible for an unprecedented rise in cases of psychological disorder among large sections of the population. The infamous witch-hunts and other atrocities committed in the name of religion during this time, are perhaps the best-known illustration of the collective insanity that had descended upon most Western countries.

To eliminate any misunderstanding, we may note here that Yoga does not condemn any religion, one of The Yoga Order's principal functions being to encourage mutual understanding and co-operation between all religious denominations. However, the truth is that conventional religion in general and individual religions - for example, Christianity - in particular, do not always work for everybody. In such cases, a dissatisfied person has every legal, moral and Spiritual right to seek fulfilment in alternative forms of Spirituality. This is a very important fact that no rational being can ignore or deny. Unlike conventional religion which has time and again become involved in acts of violence such as military invasions, forced conversions and other genocidal activities, Yoga regards the World as a Community of Free Souls and we strongly reject any attempt to impose a religious belief on intelligent beings as a serious transgression against the Spiritual Laws of the Universe.

As it happens, the light of Christianity did not bring the Illumination the Western Soul had been longing for. On the contrary, what had started as a supposed religion of brotherhood and love, soon became an instrument of social, political and religious oppression. It may be worthy of note in this context that not only have 2,000 years of Christianity produced remarkably few cases of what could qualify as Enlightenment from a Yogic point of view, but those who in the past did exhibit a degree of Spiritual Realisation, such as Meister Eckhart, St. John of the Cross or Jacob Boehme, far from receiving due recognition and support, were typically met by the Church authorities with a mixture of embarrassment and suspicion that fully exposed the system's Spiritual inadequacy. In consequence, people began to search for light elsewhere. One of the first rays of hope was that of emergent Science. Yet although the excesses of state-imposed religion were tempered somewhat by a more rational approach to life pioneered by the votaries of Science, the scientific worldview proved equally unable to satisfy the needs of the Soul. Even worse, the science-based Industrial Revolution of the late 18th and early 19th centuries was to turn millions of people into victims of systematic exploitation by the powerful few.

Thus it was against this background of general de-Spiritualisation and de-humanisation of life, that by the 19th century a new field of knowledge dawned on the academic horizon of Europe: Psychology. The way towards the reinstating of man at the centre of scholarly interest had already been paved by Anthropology, the Science of Man, through its two branches, Anatomy and Physiology, which studied the functions of the physical body. As a Spiritual complementary to this, Psychology concerned itself with the Knowledge of the Soul or Psyche, placing it at the centre of scientific investigation. There can be no doubt, therefore, that true Psychology was a Spiritual as well as scientific endeavour from the very beginning.

The result of centuries of Church-imposed suppression had been to drive people's natural Spiritual instincts into the recesses of their subconscious mind, creating a chronic psychological split in many individuals. A healing process was only possible by consciously reversing the situation. What European man needed was, first, to rediscover and reclaim his pre-Christian, Ancestral Spirituality that had previously nourished his Soul and, second, to rebuild the broken links with his Asian brothers and sisters. This was the noble task that Psychology had set itself and in so doing it offered the perfect answer to the needs of the time.

Ancient European Mythology and folklore had provided an important source of inspiration to those searching for alternative forms of Spirituality for some time. The works of Ancient Greek Philosophers were equally much-read by all knowledge-loving people. In addition to this, the European conquest of India had brought the West into contact with the vibrant Spirituality of the East on an unprecedented scale, providing a fertile soil on which the European Soul could start a new Spiritual existence.

Inspired by the great thinkers of his time and emboldened by his own researches, the Swiss Psychologist Carl Gustaf Jung (1875-1961) set about to give the Western World its Spiritual Identity back that it urgently needed in order to recover its psychological and Spiritual health and well-being. A highly intelligent and gifted man, he had long understood that the Bible was not Humanity's sole repository of Wisdom and that other Wisdom Books existed, many of which were older and perhaps wiser than the Bible itself. Not only this, but if there was any Wisdom in ancient books, might not even more Wisdom be found in the forgotten depths of man's own heart? Could not every man and woman on Earth discover their own Book of Wisdom by searching their own Souls?

Particularly popular with psychologist theorists of the time was the dubious belief that mental and emotional conditions (such as neurosis) could be solved by analysing and interpreting them in terms of the patient's history of psychosexual development - a concept chillingly reminiscent of the Church-promoted belief in Mankind's inherent sinfulness. By contrast, Jung correctly recognised that what caused psychological imbalance was the restriction or contraction of human consciousness, that is, the imposition of unnatural mental patterns - such as certain religious or scientific beliefs - upon the conscious Self or Soul. According to him, as according to Yoga, mental and emotional health and well-being could be attained only within the context of a larger Consciousness which he termed Collective Unconscious.

The concept of the Unconscious had already been known to European philosophers before Jung, and the use of dream interpretation for purposes of healing and divination had been a well-established Spiritual

practice among all peoples of the Ancient World. In keeping with the time-honoured Spirituality of his Ancestors, therefore, Jung proposed to access the Collective Unconscious, that is, the Unseen (and Unknown) World of Spirit by means of certain Yoga-like techniques such as dream analysis and active imagination.

An important concept introduced by Jung was that of the Archetypes, powerful primordial images held within the Collective Unconscious and hence common to all human beings, which appeared in European folk art and mythology since times immemorial. Such Archetypes were the Wise Old Man, the Hero, the Saviour, the Sun God and many others which all corresponded to concepts found in the Yoga tradition (Adi-Natha, Maha Vira, etc.). By consciously entering the Unconscious, man could awaken and contact these Unknown Forces and utilise their creative power to transform his life. Like the great Wisemen, Shamans and Magicians of pre-Christian Europe, the more daring among Humankind could literally become the Hero, the Saviour, or the God or Goddess of their own life.

Thus the great genius of Jung consisted in the liberation of Psychology from the prison-house of clinical Psychiatry to which it had been confined by the scientific community and making it once again into the promising Spiritual endeavour it had originally been. For this reason, Jung is rightly seen as the unchallenged father of modern Western Psychology. In his inspired and gifted hands, Psychology soon became the Master Key for unlocking the Secrets of Life that would enable the Western World to fulfil its Higher Destiny in the same way as Yoga had brought Spiritual Liberation to millions in the East. This creative fusion of Ancient Spirituality and Modern Psychology was to become the driving force behind the New Age movement and lay the foundations for the World Spirituality of the New Millennium.

What must be obvious in the light of these facts, is that as already observed, Psychology in the original sense and as expounded by Professor Jung, is a natural and necessary progression from both religious belief and scientific theory. It is that field of knowledge which brings a Spiritual dimension to human existence and elevates man to higher stages of experience. Without it, Humanity would remain imprisoned in a web of mental constructs without ever seeing the life-bringing light of its own Soul.

Furthermore, as the Enlightening and Liberating Science (or Knowledge) of the Soul, true Psychology must be admitted to be essentially identical with Yoga. Indeed, both Jungian Psychology and Yoga aim to achieve a condition of Wholeness (or Unity) through Self-Realisation or Illumination which is brought about by a process of interiorisation of consciousness. By looking within, by directing the light of one's consciousness inwards, one discovers one's real Self.

It must be remembered that Western Psychology was based not only on Ancient European Spirituality (Celtic, Germanic, Greek) but also on the Yoga tradition itself which had reached Europe through translations of Ancient Indian texts inspiring an entire constellation of free-thinking Souls from the eminent philosopher Schopenhauer to the romantic writer and poet Victor Hugo and finally to Jung himself.

Although it has been generally excluded from the investigation of modern scholarship, Europe's Spiritual link with India has in fact a long history. Previous to the translation into European languages of Ancient Indian Scriptures like the Yoga Vasishta and the Upanishads (Secret Instructions) - which had first been rendered into Arabic and Persian from the Sanskrit original - a number of European travellers following both ancient and new trade routes between Europe and Asia were instrumental in the westward dissemination of Yogic teachings. The same applies to Arab and Persian Seekers - such as the Sufi Mansur-al-Halaj in the 9th century - who reportedly travelled to India with the express intention of seeking Spiritual instruction. At about the same time, Ancient Spirituality was still very much alive in many parts of Europe on which the Church forces had not yet imposed their Bible-centred ideology. It is a well-known fact that the Pagan Faith of Ancient Europe had many elements in common with the Hindu and Buddhist traditions of India. An important seat of Pagan learning was the Academy of Athens, founded by the celebrated Greek Philosopher Plato (a disciple of Socrates) in the 4th century BC and which operated without interruption until it was forced to close by the Church authorities in the 6th century CE. The members of the Academy fled to Gondeshapur, in Persia, where they established new Spiritual links with the Eastern World, in particular with India.

Following the Muslim Arab invasion of Persia, Gondeshapur and Baghdad remained important centres of learning where hundreds of Greek, Persian and Sanskrit works were translated into Arabic. Thus the Muslim ruler Kalif Mamun (813-833) founded his famous "House of Wisdom" at Baghdad for the advancement of ancient lore. The Yoga Sutra and Samkhya Sutra were translated into Arabic about 1000 CE, and Philosophy (Love of Wisdom) in general was adopted by the Islamic World as "Falsafa". These facts explain a number of peculiar developments such as the appearance of Sufism or "Tasawuf" (derived from Greek "Theosophy" or "Love of God") as a form of Islamic mysticism.

It must be said in this context that although Yogis do not, generally speaking, leave many archaeological traces, historical evidence attests to the physical presence of "Indian sages" in the Middle East centuries before the advent of Islam. Similarly, Sanskrit inscriptions of the pre-Islamic era found in caves off the Yemeni coast indicate that Indian culture was present not only in Egypt (Alexandria) and Persia (Gondeshapur, Baghdad) as explained above, but also in the Arabian peninsula itself. We may safely infer from this that Sufism - which has many elements in common with Yoga - originally represented a form of Yoga which combined elements of Greek and Indian Philosophy to transmit its Spiritual teachings throughout the Middle East well into the Islamic age. Unfortunately, however, religious fundamentalism was to put an end to the teaching of Philosophy and other non-Islamic, "Western sciences" and Sufism itself eventually became, for all practical purposes, just a Muslim sect. Thus, as the ancient wisdom of East and West had facilitated the rise of the Islamic World, the suppression of the same brought about its final downfall.

For a better understanding of events, it is essential to remember that prior to the advent of Christianity and Islam in the region, what is today known as "Afghanistan" and "Pakistan" formed an integral part of India, thereby making India and Persia (Iran) next-door neighbours. Moreover, these two North-West Indian provinces, together with Kashmir, were at the time highly-influential centres of Spiritual (Hindu, Buddhist and Yogic) learning. Thus, the eastward exodus precipitated by religious persecution in the West, compelled Europe's exiled men of Spirit to strengthen their traditional links with both the Ancient Mysticism of Persia and the timeless Spirituality of India, setting in motion a unique Spiritual Wave that was to feed a wide spectrum of Spiritual currents from Middle-Eastern Sufism to the European Renaissance, continuing for many centuries to function as a great source of inspiration to Seekers of Truth throughout the Christian and Islamic Worlds.

Apart from the well-documented trade links between the Roman Empire and India, conclusive evidence of India's long-established Spiritual influence on Europe may be found in archaeological materials (for example, Roman inscriptions dedicated to the Indo-Persian Sun God Mithra) which suggest that Sanskrit-based mantras or mystical formulas were in use throughout the Roman Empire, that is, from Persia to Britain, up to the 3rd century CE. This fact finds further confirmation in the testimony of ancient writers (Dio Chrysostom and Clement of the first and second centuries CE) who attest the presence of Indian sages in the Egyptian city of Alexandria, a Spiritual centre of international repute in Roman times.

Indeed, the Indian Emperor Ashoka is known to have sent Buddhist monks to Greece as early as the 3rd century BC, and a century before this, Alexander the Great (after which the above-mentioned city was named) and his retinue of warriors and philosophers are reported to have maintained close contact with Yogis they had encountered during an expedition to India, being even accompanied by some of them on their return journey to Persia.

At all events, the fact is that Indian Yogis were well-known in the classical World under such names as "naked philosophers", (gymnosophists, from their custom of walking about almost or entirely naked), "forest hermits", "brahmans" and "shamans" (shramanas, in Sanskrit) as evidenced by the writings of classical writers such as Strabo and Diogenes Laertius (1st and 3rd centuries of the current era, respectively).

The teachings of Indian Yogis not only clearly influenced the leading minds of Greece and Rome but in the case of Plotinus (205-270 CE) himself, who was universally recognised as one of the wisest men of his

time, they must be seen as the primary motivating factor in his decision to undertake a (unfortunately unfinished) journey to India.

Yogic teachings are found even in Early Christian writings. For example, Saint Hippolytus of Rome, writing in the 3rd century CE, tells us that, "there are some among the Indians who live a self-sufficient life, who abstain from eating living creatures and cooked food, and subsist on fruits. They say that God is Light, not like the light one sees, nor like the Sun or fire, but like the **Light of Knowledge** whereby the secret mysteries of Nature are perceived by the Wise" (Philosophumena XXI - The Brahmins). If Yogic teachings were known even to Roman Christians, we may reasonably expect them to have been even more prevalent in Ancient Greece. Indeed, on investigation, it becomes apparent that the equation of the Supreme Spirit with Light (the Light of Consciousness) constitutes a central element in both Yogic and Greek psycho-philosophical teachings and practices from ancient times down to the present day.

Thus, in Plato's "Symposium", it is related that his master, Socrates, would for hours stand motionless in adoration of the Sun - just as Indian Yogis and ascetics do even now. The Solar Deity, Apollo Hyperboreus, was the God honoured by the members of the Socratic School at Athens. Now, "Apollo Hyperboreus" or "the Sun God of the North" is just another name for the "Midnight Sun": in mythological terms, the Sun who may be seen at midnight during the summer in the northernmost regions, shines in the Other World at night when he is stationed in the North, more specifically, in the winter; while in Spiritual terms, the Northern or Midnight Sun is nothing but the Light of Consciousness which is experienced in meditation when we enter the dark inner spaces of our subconscious where everything is at first dark as in the night until the light of consciousness dawns upon us. In India, Lord Shiva, the Universal Consciousness and Supreme Principle of Yoga, has been associated with the North from earliest times. Thus He is said to reside on Mount Kailasa in the North - beyond the main Himalayan Ranges - which is the earthly reflection of Heavenly Mount Meru, the Abode of the Supreme.

Hyperboreus, moreover, means "beyond the (northern) wind". In Spiritual terms, it signifies a supra-mental state of consciousness which lies beyond the mental processes of ordinary life which, in the manner of a blowing wind, disturb the natural peace and clarity of the human Soul. In other words, this region "beyond the northern wind" is nothing but Nirvana itself, which literally means, "No-blowing" or "No-moving", that is to say, the absolute motionlessness and calmness of the Enlightened Condition where the Supreme Light of Consciousness reigns supreme. In Ancient Greek terms, it is Hyperborea, the Blessed Land where the Sun shines day and night.

This extraordinary state of Nirvana is to be found in a higher mode of consciousness which is characterised by unobstructed Clarity and Insight symbolised by the Sun, Moon, fire or any other source of light. Meditation on the Supreme - traditionally defined as Consciousness and Bliss - in the form of light is prescribed in all Indian sacred texts from the Puranas to the Vedas and the Upanishads.

Says the Shiva Purana: "He who, with a pure mind, worships the Supreme Lord (Shiva) in the solar disc in the morning, midday and dusk, is certainly liberated" (Vayaviya Samhita II, 8:35-36). Jung himself prescribed visualisation of, and contemplation on, the sun-disc, not only for its therapeutic effect but also as a tried method of Spiritual self-realisation. Just as a burning candle is capable of lighting another candle, meditation on light stimulates and finally awakens man's dormant light of consciousness the awakening of which brings about self-realisation or direct recognition of one's own identity with Consciousness itself, the Light of all lights (Maha Prakasha). Says the Upanishad: "The Supreme Being who is in fire and in the yonder Sun is also in the heart of man". Jung similarly declares: "Whoever has in himself God, the Sun, is immortal, like the Sun".

Although this Spiritual dimension is often denied in modern academic circles which seek to present psychology and philosophy as a purely intellectual enterprise, it becomes clear that the Light of Consciousness as a darkness or ignorance dispelling Spiritual force is the Supreme Principle which Western psychology and philosophy have shared with the Eastern tradition of Yoga from the very beginning. Indeed, the sacred geography, Spiritual symbolism and emphasis on Self-knowledge ("Know thyself" was the maxim inscribed above the entrance to the Oracle of Apollo at Delphi) shared by both the

Socratic school of Greece and the Yogic tradition of India, clearly indicate a basic identity between the two traditions.

Going further back in time, the Orphic Traditions (so-called Mystery Religions) of Ancient Greece and Thrace (8th-9th centuries BC) - on which later philosophical schools like that of Socrates were based - had sufficient elements in common with the teachings of Yoga (Reincarnation, the Wheel of Rebirth, Vegetarianism) to render them essentially identical with the latter, in particular, if we consider that "Yoga" in its original sense meant "Spiritual Discipline", as opposed to the "System of physical postures" for which it is taken by many today. A similar relation of identity may be found between the European and Indian systems of Astrology which, in their original form, had a magical, religious and Spiritual significance. Finally, we must not forget that European languages themselves were closely related to Sanskrit, the classical language of India, which for millennia has functioned as the linguistic medium for the transmission of Yogic teaching.

In short, there can be no doubt that numerous channels of Spiritual communication between East and West have been in operation - as they still are - since prehistoric times. Humans are, after all, communicative beings. In any event, that modern Spirituality has been greatly influenced, inspired and stimulated by Yogic thought can hardly be a matter of debate nor can modern Psychology, as a Spiritual endeavour, logically be assumed to have remained outside the Yogic sphere of influence. The fact is that Yogic teaching has not only provided the foundation for modern Western Spirituality (including Psychology) but has also brought profound changes to Science itself.

A few instances of this will no doubt suffice to illustrate the point. Charles Darwin's theory of evolution is, for all practical purposes, merely a materialist form of the Yogic teaching concerning the evolution of the individual atom of consciousness that gradually evolves through mineral, vegetal and animal life to human, superhuman and finally Divine, modes of existence. Being initially adopted by the scientific community as a non-religious alternative to the biblical Creation Myth, Darwin's findings are now more correctly seen by many scientists and theologians as describing the biological aspect of what constitutes an essentially Spiritual process. Yoga, of course, fully agrees with the concept of life as an evolutionary process, yet it insists that this process is governed by a Higher, Spiritual Principle or Force.

If the doubt should arise here as to how precisely had a British scholar of the 19th century come to be in possession of Yogic knowledge, the answer is very simple. Being contemporaneous with such remarkable students of Eastern Spirituality as the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) and the French poet and writer Victor Hugo (1802-1885), and having taken an interest in religion before turning to natural history, Darwin (1809-1882) must have come across the same, or similar, Yogic material as inspired other European luminaries of his time. In fact, as a British subject with an interest in religion he could scarcely have avoided coming into contact with the Spirituality of India, a country that at the time was in every respect a very important part of the British Empire.

Nor must one suppose that the theory of evolution was in any way an exclusive monopoly of Darwin. The less famous British naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace and the Dutch anatomist Eugene Dubois, among others, had come to much the same scientific conclusions as Darwin himself. Interestingly, they were both taken by their researches to the East Indies. Now, without wishing to stretch the point, it seems rather difficult to dismiss as a matter of coincidence the fact that three different European men should have developed the same notion of Creation as an evolutionary process, simultaneously and independently of one another at precisely that point in European history when Yogic ideas were becoming accessible to the Western mind on an unprecedented scale.

Indeed, much as Indian culture and Spirituality had deeply influenced the whole of East Asia including China and Japan, the immense impact of Indian Wisdom on the Western World was such that by the 19th century many facets of it had become common knowledge among the educated classes from Russia (see Helena P. Blavatsky, 1831-1891) to Britain (Annie Besant, 1847-1933), illumining even such supposedly remote and backward corners of Europe as Romania where, in the second half of the century, the romantic

poet Michael Eminescu (1850-1889) would be moved to compose verses to Kamadeva, the Hindu God of Love (who is universally revered in India as a manifestation of Lord Shiva).

One only needs to think of the Anthroposophist movement, for instance, a world-wide Spiritual initiative founded by the Austrian philosopher and scientist, Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), that is known to have absorbed a wide range of Eastern ideas and practices including meditation. After all, if Yogic terms like "Atman", "Nirvana", "Reincarnation" and "Yoga" have long become assimilated into Western languages, we may safely conjecture that the teachings and practices they describe cannot have been far behind, as evidenced by the following statement: "Clear knowledge of spirit arises from Yoga, or abstraction of Nirvana" (W. Ward 1820). Nor can scientists, in so far as they belong to the human species, be supposed to be entirely isolated from, or immune to, cross-cultural influences.

We can now easily understand how timeless Yogic teachings such as those based upon the concept of a Universal Energy as the underlying substratum of the material World could have passed into the teachings of modern Physics. We can also see how, in the field of modern Medicine, a rising number of Western practitioners are professionally recognising the prophylactic and therapeutic properties of Yogic techniques while many of them are personally taking up the practice of Yoga. It is an established fact that most complementary and alternative techniques of diagnosis and therapy in use today, for example, Reiki (or energy-healing) are ultimately based on the teachings of Yoga, having reached the West via Tibet and the Far East. The therapeutic use of Meditation, Chanting, Spiritual Music, Aromatherapy and a whole range of other techniques extensively employed in alternative Medicine today, have been equally known to the Yogis of India for millennia. This, of course, is only natural if we consider that as the Science of Unity, Yoga logically includes the Science of Wholeness or Health. (We may note in this context that Shiva, the God of Yoga has been regarded as the Supreme Physician since prehistoric times.)

In the light of this, our contention to the effect that Western Psychology is ultimately based upon, and originated in, the teachings of Yoga, is neither surprising nor can be reasonably denied. It can hardly be mere coincidence that European words denoting consciousness are practically direct translations of the Yogic term Samvid - the Swedish word Samvete being even phonetically identical with the Sanskrit original - and that other key psychological terms likewise find their equivalents in Yogic vocabulary: ego (aham), id (idam), etc. Even psychoanalytical terms like "Nirvana-principle", notwithstanding their negative connotations, demonstrate a clear link to Yogic teachings.

Of course, in his talks and writings, Jung could only express this fact in an indirect way. One had to be careful when talking about things that challenged the consensus ideology of the time. Indeed, the situation was such that until well into the second half of the 20th century, Spiritual Seekers wishing to break free from the stranglehold of official dogma were often forced to meet in secret and lived in fear of being discovered by the authorities. The State-sponsored arrogance and intolerance towards non-Biblical culture and Spirituality is perhaps best epitomised in the infamous utterance of a British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill: "I hate Indians. They are a beastly people with a beastly religion." And this in spite of the fact that thousands of Indians lost their lives defending the Empire's interests in many parts of the World.

Evidently, this irrational, offensive and almost pathological hostility towards non-Biblical forms of Spirituality was systematically fostered by the political Establishment of Europe as a tool for maintaining power over its own people as well as keeping the colonised nations under control. Unconditional obedience to Church and State had to be enforced by any means. It will be not out of place to observe here that according to the Declaration Dominus Iesus, recently issued by the Vatican (5th Sept. 2000), non-Christian religions represent "an obstacle to salvation". This confirms the wide-spread concern that, even today, far from seeking to redress past errors, leading figures within the Christian community continue to cultivate an irresponsible attitude of unexamined prejudice against non-Biblical traditions.

Even so, Jung whose teachings had already reached Britain and America, was bold enough to affirm that Western Psychology and the string of techniques that had arisen from it, was the effort of mere beginners when compared to the state-of-the-art Spirituality of the East. In his essay, Yoga and the West, Jung explains that Yoga aims to achieve nothing less than the liberation of consciousness from the limitations of

objects and ideas. In doing so, he implicitly (and correctly) equates his own system of Analytical Psychology or Psychosynthesis (Self-Unity) to Yoga - which shared the same Spiritual Ideal with the teachings of the Ancient European Masters (Plato, Plotinus, etc) - as opposed to mainstream Psychology which remained the prisoner of its own biased and, therefore, unscientific materialism.

Jung unequivocally made his position clear by stating that Yoga offered undreamt-of possibilities. Indeed, Yoga offers everything already given by both Religion and Science to which it adds the benefit of Higher Experience and the prospect of freedom, power and happiness in this very lifetime. In view of the public attitude towards "alien faiths" that was prevalent in Jung's time, it would be unreasonable to expect him to have expressed his views any more clearly than he did. Needless to say, had he done so, it would have amounted to professional suicide. Jung was, after all, a Psychiatrist by profession and although many regarded him as a Spiritual leader, his main concern was to wean his colleagues away from their sterile and often anti-Spiritual approach to the treatment of psychological conditions.

Jung's dilemma was that while he was - in true Yogic fashion - fully aware of the fact that one could not properly practise Psychiatry (Soul-Healing) without true Psychology (Soul-Knowledge), society was still not ready to accept his insights into the exact nature of genuine Psychology which, as we have seen, was essentially identical with Yoga. In consequence, Jung had to put his teachings across as gently and cautiously as possible, often even in coded language, so as not to offend the political, religious or scientific sensitivities of his audience. Nor should this surprise us as to a large extent we are obliged to do the same even today. As we are entering the New Millennium, we find ourselves living in a society that is still very much in the grip of political, religious or scientific dogma. Freedom of Consciousness and Freedom of Expression remain a rare and most precious possession that continues to be threatened by ignorance and intolerance in many parts of the World including the West.

Conclusion

From what has gone before, the whole issue may be summed up as follows: Psychologically speaking, Yoga is a process leading to Self-Awareness, Self-Knowledge or Self-Unity, that is, a mode of experience in which consciousness has a direct perception of itself and operates in unity, or at one, with itself, thereby creating a unique condition of wholeness, health and happiness. All religious, scientific or Spiritual teaching or activity, including certain forms of Western Psychology, is logically identical with Yoga when, and to the extent to which, it produces the same results.

In historical terms, Western Psychology, in particular its Jungian branch, has been stimulated, inspired and influenced by Yoga and has in turn prepared the ground for the understanding and acceptance of Yoga on a large scale in Western Society. Indeed, Jung's Analytical Psychology may be said to be the only modern Western system of thought through which Yoga can be properly understood. (As far as Ancient European traditions are concerned, those of the Druids and pre-Christian Gnostics may fulfil a similar function.) From a Spiritual viewpoint, therefore, which includes both the psychological and historical dimensions of the issue, the true function of Western Psychology has consisted in removing the culture-specific psychological sediments that were blocking the channels of East-West Spiritual communication so that the World-Liberating Yogic Truth of Universal Unity may reach the heart of all people. Today, this Spiritual Process is carried forward and expanded through the worldwide activities of The Yoga Order and the teaching entities associated with it.

In the context of practical application it may suffice to here observe that Yoga Psychology has many points of resemblance with not only the teachings of Carl G. Jung - in particular active imagination - but also what is known as Transpersonal Psychology and Cognitive Behaviour Therapy. What is essential to understand in all circumstances is that the aim of Yogic teachings and practices is primarily Spiritual in nature.

For further information on Yoga Psychology see also **The thirty-six Realities (Tattvas) of Yoga and Obstacles on the Yoga Path.**

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 9

LINE OF TEACHING

QUESTION: Are there any other authentic Lines of Yoga Teachers apart from the one promoted by The Yoga Order?

ANSWER: Our tradition belongs to a very ancient Spiritual Line that was graciously initiated by the **Supreme Being (Parama Shiva) Himself** through His Divine Manifestation **Lord Shiva Shri-Kantha** and continued down to the present day by the World Teachers, Duravasa, Dharmakunda, Satyapati, Mahakala, Adinatha, Ramanatha, Jaleshvara, Svachchanda, Shambhunatha, Guptanatha and **Mahaguru Soma-Natha Maharaj Dev**, the Supreme Leader of **Shri Yoga Mahasamaj (The Yoga Order)**.

However, Truth is a free, independent and self-existing reality on which nobody can claim to hold a monopoly. We, therefore, do not promote any particular Line of Teachers as "the only true one" even if such a line existed. Our aim is to help Spiritual Seekers to establish a direct link to a Higher Reality. At the same time, however, it is our duty to ensure that the practical, theoretical and Spiritual framework through which this link is established remains in harmony with the Original Yoga Tradition as we understand it on the basis of historical and Spiritual evidence.

The fact is that there is only One Spiritual Reality. In consequence, all Spiritual traditions are necessarily rooted in the same One Truth. This is particularly true of the Eastern traditions belonging to **Glorious Dharma-Agama** which is the Original Divinely Revealed Tradition of the **Supreme Eternal Law of the Universe (Sanatana Dharma)** which was established by the Supreme Being at the beginning of Time. These traditions are: Yoga, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism. They are the five main branches of Divine Revelation, which Parama Shiva, the Supreme Being, broadcasted in the five directions of the World (upwards, eastwards, southwards, westwards and northwards) for the salvation and upliftment of the human race. All other traditions are just offshoots of this **Original Divine Revelation (Adi Dharma)**. As far as Western traditions are concerned, it almost goes without saying that they are true when and to the extent that they agree with these five and false when they disagree.

However, even in the East, some lines of teachers have strayed from the **Original Path (Adi Dharma)**. Some Spiritual leaders are attempting to portray Hinduism or Buddhism, for example, as separate from, and even contrary to, the **Tradition of Yoga (Yoga Dharma)**. To understand how such deplorable deviations from the **Original Path** are possible, it is necessary to acquaint ourselves with the Spiritual facts of life. The total World population has been estimated at about 6 billion, a truly impressive figure. Yet we must not forget that there are far more Souls living on other planes of existence. They too have to be included in the Spiritual Process. Being infinitely more numerous than those on Earth, this means that the real Spiritual Work is being carried out there, rather than here. In consequence, the **Original and Authentic Streams of Spiritual Instruction** are much more pure and powerful on the other planes. By contrast, those operating on Earth are necessarily smaller, weaker and susceptible to contamination by un-Spiritual energies.

The **Infinite Ocean of Universal Intelligence** can without doubt generate and support any number of Spiritual currents, just as a great lake of pure water can feed several outward-flowing streams. However, while on the Higher Planes, due to the greater purity of those regions, the Streams of Yogic Teaching retain their purity to a large degree, those operating on Earth inevitably become affected by the un-Spiritual and even anti-Spiritual situation of the material World, just as in the case of ordinary water streams, due to the chemical or physical composition of the terrain through which they take their course, some or all of them may become sufficiently polluted for their water to be rendered unsuitable for human consumption. This is only natural, since on the physical plane to which Planet Earth belongs, even Spiritual Energy is more dense and less active or less efficient than in the higher dimensions of existence.

Thus, while all Streams of Yogic Teaching - with the exception of bogus ones which do exist - are legitimate in the sense that they originate in the same **Authentic Source**, the fact remains that due to the influence emanating from the environment in which they operate, some have become contaminated with, or distorted by, cultural, psychological or socio-political issues that render them unsafe for Seekers who are susceptible to such contamination. In the interest of truth and without wishing to appear uncharitable, it must be said that, since in this material world the value of Yoga practice is mainly seen to lie in its capacity to resolve physical and mental issues, certain "Yoga Schools" have come to exhibit a greater resemblance to medical institutions than to places of Spiritual learning.

While the desire to help people find mental and physical well-being is in itself admirable, this selective approach has sadly resulted in the Spiritual side of Yoga being largely overlooked and neglected. Now from the perspective of Yoga, no healing process is complete without reference to man's Soul or indwelling Spirit. Moreover, the aforementioned enterprises have consistently failed to produce any Enlightened Souls, which is what the World at present urgently needs and which is the true function and purpose of Yoga. This is also the reason why we are strongly appealing to all genuine Yoga teaching agencies to urgently join forces and double their efforts to resolve this deplorable situation. Yoga must urgently regain Worldwide recognition and influence as the indispensable force for good that it evidently represents.

As regards the authenticity of a Preceptorial Line, uninformed outsiders often entertain the opinion that Self-Realised Masters must appoint a successor in a formal transfer of authority. This is a superficial perception of reality. Initiated Yogis know that contrary to the expectations of outsiders, the transmission of Spiritual authority can and does occur quite naturally and spontaneously. Indeed, the **Universal Yoga Stream** is like a subterranean current that may spring to surface anywhere and at any time, or again, like a plant that grows offshoots at the most unexpected points in time and space. This being so, the sole criterion of authenticity that we may reasonably apply to a particular Spiritual line is that it operates in Unity with the **Original Teaching (Adi Dharma)** as defined above. The fulfilment of this criterion will suffice to qualify it as authentic even when the question of preceptorial succession has found no clear conventional answer.

All true Spiritual Activity, such as a Yoga Class, Group, Circle or Order, is a living channel through which the **Original, Unique and Eternally One Source Teaching** can express itself unimpeded and according to its own inner dynamics. Although Spiritual Conduits of this order may be found in operation on Earth, they are not only extremely rare but, as a rule, beyond the reach of outsiders. To our best knowledge, The Yoga Order represents one of the very few currents of Yogic Teaching that meet the criteria of Authentic Spiritual Activity while being at the same time - and to a large extent - available to the public, indeed, it was brought into being with the specific intention of enhancing public awareness of the true spirit of Yoga as originally revealed.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 10

TRADITIONAL TEACHING

QUESTION: Is there a need for traditional systems of Spiritual Teaching?

ANSWER: Yes, absolutely. This very question proves the indispensable role of traditional Spiritual Teaching in removing ignorance and confusion.

The essence of all Spirituality is Self-Awareness, that is, the Awareness of oneself as a Spiritual Being who lives in Unity and Harmony with Spiritual Reality. To live a Spiritual life means to live in constant Unity and Harmony with that Higher Reality.

In the experience of all Self-Realised Masters, who are always Self-Aware, Life is an indivisible Unity. Everything has its existence within One Cosmic Order which is upheld by Universal Laws or Principles. From the perspective of Yoga which is the Spirituality of Universal Unity (or to be more precise, the Living Expression of Universal Unity and Order), there are three basic types of Law that govern life on Earth:

1. Law of the Universe, or Law of a Higher Spiritual Reality.
2. Law of Nature, or law inherent in the nature of material things (including plants and animals) which agrees with the Law of the Universe.
3. Law of man or man-made artificial law which does not always agree with either the law of Nature or the Law of the Universe.

From a superficial point of view, success in earthly life appears to depend on the manipulation and exploitation of materials, of people, of Nature. Yet even then we have to abide by certain rules or laws. If we invent our own laws we will sooner or later come into conflict with other individuals and with the authorities. Even in a "lawless" society, there is in practice some kind of agreement and co-operation between conflicting law systems. If we lived outside society, among Nature and wild animals, or even entirely on our own, we would still have to take into consideration physical and biological laws. Likewise, at the Spiritual level, there are Spiritual laws, that is, governing principles of Spiritual Reality, that need to be strictly observed if we wish to enter and explore the Higher Planes of existence.

As there is only One Spiritual Reality, success in Spiritual life necessarily depends on the individual's adaptation to, and assimilation of, that Reality and its inherent laws or governing principles. Creating one's own Yoga practice, one's own belief system, one's own system of Spiritual values, one's own reality even, may be highly popular with certain people but ultimately leads to a life in a make-believe world that is at odds both with the worlds of others and with the One True Reality. Constructing one's own system of Yoga Teaching and Practice that is so fashionable among self-appointed "Yoga Teachers" and "Seekers" today, amounts to a refusal - or inability - to adapt to Reality and its Spiritual Laws. In other words, it is a symptom of Spiritual unfitness. Instead of finding a real answer to this deep-seated issue, those who are unfit for the Spiritual Path attempt to cover it up by inventing their own "Spiritual Reality". This is a very dangerous game.

What genuine Spiritual Seekers must understand is that Yoga is not a man-made system. Yogic postures, for example, were not invented by individual Yogis, nor even developed by a long process of trial and error. They were established on the basis of spontaneous expressions or activities of a Higher Intelligence whose purpose is to bring the individual life-system back in unity and harmony with the Universal Being. To give a parallel from the animal kingdom, you will have observed that animals and birds bend and stretch to release tension, which is done instinctively and in exactly the same way as all other members of the same species do and have done for millions of years.

The fact is that Yoga is an Expression of the Infinite and Eternal Universal Intelligence. Through the practice of Yoga in the Original Tradition, we put ourselves under the radiant influence, guidance and protection of the Higher Forces in the Universe and consciously, willingly and joyously participate in the life-transforming process of Spiritual Elevation that is Yoga.

For a person of mediocre intelligence, who is moreover untutored and inexperienced in Spiritual matters, to imagine that he has the Spiritual intelligence, knowledge and experience to improve the Original Yoga Tradition or to create his own "Yoga" is simply the result of precisely that kind of ego-based reasoning that constitutes the greatest obstacle on the Spiritual Path. Those who succumb to this mentality do not only create division - the opposite of Yoga or Unity - within the World Spiritual Community but are wasting their and other people's time, intelligence and energy, thereby greatly interfering with their own and others' natural process of Spiritual Evolution.

Whether in this lifetime or some future existence, everybody will eventually come to realise that the Spiritual Laws of the Universe cannot be transgressed with impunity and that it is in one's own best interest

to accept the Teachings of Yoga as they are. This being so, we strongly recommend that all ego-inspired and erroneous ideas be recognised as such and abandoned forthwith. This voluntary activity of self-clarification and illumination constitutes in fact the first requirement in creating the inner attitude necessary for a Spiritual Seeker to successfully travel on the Right Path. Otherwise, by doubting the Infinite Wisdom of the Universal Intelligence and naively attempting to correct or improve it, we are excluding ourselves from the very Spiritual Process we are claiming to promote.

A true Spiritual Master will accept that he cannot reinvent Truth and will have no desire to do so. A Yoga Master who is a Master of Unity will always adhere to the Yogic Principle of Unity. He will constantly do his best to harmonise and unify all the different traditions rather than look for points of difference and grounds for discord, let alone start his own Spirituality for purposes of self-promotion. Spirituality is about co-operation, not competition. Unite and Serve, instead of Divide and Rule, is the basis of all True Spiritual Teaching. A True Master may adopt a new language or even new methods of instruction but he will always adhere to the Original and Unique Source Teaching which is Eternally One.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 11

RENUNCIATION

QUESTION: In many people's view, the World is good and enjoyable; why then is it regarded as something to be renounced if we wish to attain Enlightenment?

ANSWER: The term "renunciation" has been the subject of much misunderstanding and misinterpretation. In the experience of accomplished Yogis, the World is a beautiful creation of the Supreme Intelligence. So why renounce it?

The short answer is that what we must renounce is not the World itself, but our limited and distorted experience thereof. This much should have been understood by now even in the West. Unfortunately, this does not seem to be the case. In our endeavour to solve the problem, therefore, we must identify three main factors, the elucidation of which should lead to a proper understanding of the matter: (1) the definition of the word "renunciation" or sannyas, in Yogic terminology, (2) what it means to the person who renounces (sannyasi or renunciant) and (3) what meaning it can have for society at large.

First, what must be accepted as established beyond any shadow of doubt is that human perception of reality is very limited: even animals often possess faculties of sensory perception that are far superior to those of ordinary humans. It is for this very reason, and for the sole purpose of completing, expanding and clarifying our perception of reality, that entire fields of knowledge such as philosophy, religion, science and psychology have been established by the thinking minds of the World.

Yet a limited perception of the World is only the beginning of the problem. Limited as it already is, this perception is further distorted by our psycho-mental apparatus: our sense faculties are conditioned to perceive certain data to the exclusion of others; our emotion patterns ensure that we feel in predetermined ways about certain things; and our intellectual training demands that we think in a fixed way about everything.

Thus the human mind acts as a filter consisting of sense perceptions, emotions and thought-constructs which allows only a very watered-down and muddled-up picture of reality to enter our field of awareness. This necessarily leads to a faulty understanding of the World which in turn creates an incoherent, inharmonious and ultimately dysfunctional, relationship with the World, leaving us trapped in a truly hopeless situation.

In consequence, what Yoga or common sense, suggests, is not that we give up the World but our dependence on a limited and distorted perception of the World. The difficulty lies in the fact that in order to acquire a clearer and more reliable perception of the World, we need to do two things: detach ourselves from the habitual World in order to prevent the mind from constantly re-inforcing and imposing upon us its distorted picture of the World; and direct our conscious attention to those aspects of the World which our mind until now has systematically excluded from the picture.

Should anybody prove capable of accomplishing this without any form or degree of isolation from the World, we naturally wish them good luck. We shall not here concern ourselves with those rare cases, but limit ourselves to the majority of Spiritual aspirants who may, as a matter of fact, require from time to time brief or prolonged periods of retirement from, or "renunciation" of, the known World. (The discerning Seeker will, no doubt, have observed that even the opponents of renunciation often offer "retreats" to their followers.) We shall accordingly further investigate the process of renunciation.

It will be remembered that what is ordinarily experienced as "World" is just a small fragment of the totality of reality: *there is much more to the World than a Spiritually untrained mind allows us to see*. Logically speaking then, even if the World were renounced in a negative sense, this would hardly constitute a major issue so long as reality is not renounced in its *totality*, supposing of course, that such total renunciation be possible. If, on the other hand, the World were to be renounced in a positive sense, this would certainly amount to a positive, rather than negative enterprise.

Negative renunciation is the act of rejecting the World as worthless or even harmful and is negative by virtue of its being based on a negative attitude towards the World. It is, of course, not found among genuine Yogis. Yet even this kind of renunciation presupposes a desire in the renunciant to seek something better, which desire must be admitted to be good - or positive - in nature, being potentially conducive to an improved condition or situation. Now, if the desire that prompts the renunciant in his action is essentially good, then the act of renunciation itself cannot be altogether bad. Naturally, we may expect a positive form of renunciation to be even better.

Indeed, as we shall presently explain, positive or true renunciation is neither negative nor is it renunciation - in the absolute sense - at all. It must be once more recalled that ordinary experience of reality or "the World" is limited and fragmentary. In consequence, *renunciation is the provisional abandonment of a limited mode of experience for the purpose of acquiring a less limited one*. (The adjective "provisional" is here used to stress the fact that, having reached a higher level, the renunciant is free to return any time to lower points in the spectrum of experience if he so chooses. In other words, the end result of renunciation is an increased freedom of experience. As a matter of fact, the extraordinary freedom of experience it confers on its followers is precisely what has made Yoga so attractive to generations upon generations of Spiritual Seekers.)

When correctly understood, the purpose of renunciation is to enable us to go beyond, or transcend, limited habitual experience together with our psychological dependence on such experience. Once a higher and wider experience of reality has been attained, this will in turn transform, complete - and thereby enhance - our previously limited mode of experience. As a result of this process of transformation, the initially abandoned World is finally seen in a new light and re-integrated into one's expanded experience of life. This is the true meaning of renunciation.

In practice, we may identify three forms or levels of renunciation:

1. Physical and mental isolation from human society.
2. Psychological non-attachment to material reality.
3. Spiritual non-attachment to both material and non-material aspects of reality.

In the first instance, physical and mental interaction with other human beings is drastically reduced, as in the case of monks living in a monastic community, or altogether suspended, as in the case of a hermit who

lives well outside the range of human society. In the second, interaction with material reality needs neither be restricted nor completely suspended but continued on a level that is not conducive to psychological attachment or dependence. In the third instance, the aim is to eliminate all forms of attachment, including to non-material forms of existence such as the astral or other planes.

While in the first case, reduction or suspension of contact with society may still leave the renunciant open to psychological attachment to such contact, all attachment is eliminated in relation to physical reality in the second case and in relation to both physical and non-physical reality, in the third. The last two levels do not include physical isolation as a necessary condition, the renunciation taking place on the psychological and Spiritual level, respectively. In other words, social contact needs not be an impediment to Spiritual development, provided that it is accompanied by the correct inner attitude.

As already observed, renunciation is a process of transcending limited experience along with our psychological dependence on, or addiction to, such experience. It is a conscious transition from the psychological to the Spiritual field of experience and is understood as such by authentic, that is, Spiritually informed practisers of renunciation. This transition does not mean the total and permanent elimination of limited, psychological experience from our field of awareness but its integration into the larger and more real sphere of Spiritual reality. As such, it represents a positive step forwards in a person's Spiritual evolution.

As for the meaning it can have for society, it is known from archaeological, historical and other sources, that various forms and degrees of withdrawal from ordinary life have been practised in all human societies from earliest prehistoric times down to our day. The stone-age shamans of Asia and Europe, the native medicine men of America and Australia, the priests, magicians and prophets of Ancient Egypt, India and Greece, religious leaders like Orpheus, Moses, Buddha, Jesus and Muhammad, as well as 20th century sages like Ramana Maharshi of Arunachala, are reported to have spent periods of isolation, partial or total, from what is commonly termed "the World".

The fact is that these episodes of temporary isolation are not regarded as having produced results detrimental to the society or tradition in question. Ancient Pagan sanctuaries, Hindu ashrams, Buddhist and Christian monasteries, have always been important seats of knowledge and great sources of inspiration to entire populations. In fact, if we define renunciation as the abandonment, temporary and partial or otherwise, of certain situations, activities or experiences, then it must be admitted to constitute a factor so fundamental to all human life as for its exclusion therefrom to appear neither desirable nor indeed possible.

Thus, a new-born baby begins life in this World by abandoning the mother's womb. A child abandons the state of childhood to reach adulthood. An adult abandons this life for the next, hopefully better, life. When we walk, we abandon a patch of earth and place our foot on another in order to move forwards. When we exhale, we expel a volume of used air so we can inhale fresh air. When we think, we let go of a thought so we can generate a new one. A political leader may temporarily retire from the cares of state to collect his thoughts and gather the strength to better discharge the duties of his office. An artist or scientist may avoid social contact to concentrate on the work of art or scientific discovery he is about to make and so on... When seen from this perspective, the whole of life proves to be a constant flow of letting-go instances, of "moments of renunciation" which are all directed towards the attainment of something good, positive, creative.

As far as Yoga is concerned, it has always been accepted practice among the followers of the Yoga Path to temporarily or permanently renounce the comforts and pleasures of ordinary life and devote themselves to Spiritual practices exclusively. However, to interpret this as negative indifference to the World, means to completely misunderstand the Yogis' motives and intentions and to be blind to their true function in the World.

Suppose a host, in the course of a party and with the full satisfaction of his visitors in mind, leaves his guests to ensure that the supply of food, drinks and entertainment is running according to plan. To the

uninformed guests, his absence may appear to amount to a blatant disregard of his duties, when in fact the reverse is true. Something similar happens in the case of Yogis who, unbeknown to outsiders, contribute in a variety of essential ways to Mankind's welfare while externally appearing to be wholly detached or disinterested.

The fact is that regardless of how renunciation is interpreted by the uninitiated, the Yogis of India have always been regarded by their fellow citizens as compassionate beings. Historically speaking, out of compassion for the World, Yogis have often renounced their state of blissful isolation to resume social interaction at all levels of life. Many have acted as advisers to political rulers. Others have initiated and supervised the founding of cultural and religious institutions, Spiritual schools, charity organisations, or military orders. Indeed, a number of ancient Yogic or Yoga-inspired texts such as the highly acclaimed Yoga-Vasishtha, far from advocating nihilistic inaction, vigorously promote a harmonious blending of Spiritual knowledge and action.

Even the most celebrated renunciant of all times, Lord Buddha himself, renounced his high social status and became a mendicant monk only to spend most of his life preaching to growing numbers of followers and laying the foundation of what was to become a major World Religion. In modern times, Shri Aurobindu of Pondicherry (1872-1950) who had begun his career as a militant campaigner in India's struggle against British occupation, renounced the World to write a number of Spiritual works and form a powerful movement known as Integral Yoga. Swami Shivananda of Rishikesh (1887-1963), a successful medical doctor, renounced the World to devote himself to the publication of hundreds of books and the establishment of a worldwide Yoga School. Swami Muktananda of Ganeshpuri (1908-1983), having taken the vows of renunciation early in his life, travelled to many countries, initiating yet another Spiritual movement known as Siddha Yoga. In view of these facts, even the most recalcitrant sceptic must concede that far from being absolute, renunciation often simply means the shifting of one's focus of interaction with the World from the material to a more Spiritual level.

This is only natural since, from the perspective of Yoga, the World is not an illusion but a real creation of the Universal Intelligence or God. The intention of genuine Yogis then, is not to forget the World but to adjust and harmonise their experience of the World with the Universal Mind who created it. To ensure that this process of harmonisation is not disrupted or even rendered impossible by ordinary life, short- or long-term isolation from the World may under circumstances become necessary. This may amount to anything from several days to a few months or, in extreme cases, even years.

Although the notion of physical or mental isolation, however partial and temporary, may give rise in certain individuals to objections to, and even wholesale rejection of, Spiritual practices, such reactions are as unfounded as a child's fear of going to sleep. The truth is that, as we open ourselves to a broader spectrum of reality, our capacity for sensory perception, emotion, or thought cannot possibly diminish; on the contrary, our experience of the World becomes richer, more harmonious and more enjoyable.

In the same way as when tired, ordinary men withdraw from the World and go to sleep in order to better see and enjoy the World upon waking, so also, Yogis temporarily retire from the World so that they may acquire a clearer and broader vision of it which in turn will inspire and enlighten their own life and that of their fellow humans. What must be beyond doubt is that life lived on any of the three levels of renunciation or non-attachment as defined earlier, has the potential of inducing the development in the aspirant of a wide range of essential psychological qualities such as humility, compassion, patience, self-control, resistance to pain, fearlessness, non-attachment, selflessness and will-power as well as psychic abilities such as an enhanced power of intuition, telepathy, clairvoyance etc., all these being the result of close contact with the Spiritual planes and manifestations of the awakening Spiritual power (Shakti) operating on those planes, enabling the successful practiser to offer a valuable living example to others. Finally, one may reasonably argue that, in a World that is becoming more and more intrusive, crowded and alienated from Nature, partial or total withdrawal from ordinary life offers a welcome relief. Indeed, in many cases, it may already constitute a medical necessity.

In the light of this, the emotional rejection of the validity of renunciation as a legitimate Spiritual means, demonstrates the Spiritual and psychological immaturity of its opponents. It is the opponents of renunciation who are being negative, first because they base their rejection on the evidently false assumption that what they perceive as being renounced, that is, "the World", is the only or most important aspect of reality and second, because they misinterpret or misunderstand the renouncer's true motives and intention.

Those who are irritated by the idea of renunciation should be aware of the not irrelevant fact that their reaction may be the symptom of an underlying psychological fixation with what they perceive as the World. What is more alarming, however, is that this kind of psychological commitment may inadvertently promote the cause of those who seek to suppress the freedom of religious and Spiritual expression that constitutes the very foundation of a free World. Needless to say, such misguided attitudes are already rampant in many places on Earth and are scarcely in need of encouragement from supposedly more enlightened members of the human race.

Regardless of how Spiritually untutored outsiders view renunciation, it remains an indispensable practice of great psychological, social and Spiritual benefit to millions of people, especially in the de-Spiritualised and addiction-promoting society of today. In practice, however, whether or not a person should enter on the path of renunciation will be determined by the aspirant's psychological predispositions, Spiritual fitness and external circumstances. At any rate, in Yoga, nobody is forced to renounce anything. Accordingly, we would like to conclude with the words of the Enlightened Masters themselves: Neither seek nor reject, just be your real Self. This, in the final analysis, is the true Yogic attitude.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 12

ADVAITA

QUESTION: What is Advaita?

ANSWER: Advaita is just another name for Yoga, for a harmonious, unified experience of life. If we understand Yoga (Unity) we also understand Advaita (Undividedness) and vice versa.

Yoga believes in the absolute unity of Life. From this perspective, reality consists of intelligent energy, or Consciousness. Consciousness has the capacity to ascend or descend on the scale of experience in any number of ways and to any conceivable or inconceivable level. The highest point in this scale is absolute unity of experience (Advaita or Yoga) and the lowest, dis-unity or duality (dvaita or viyoga).

When our consciousness appears incapable of recognising the unity of all life, when we seem unable to experience peace inside ourselves or between us and the World, when we are torn between different aspects of reality, when our consciousness is on the verge of drowning in an endless torrent of distinct, separate and often contradictory sense perceptions, feelings, or thoughts, we experience dvaita (disunity).

When, on the other hand, we experience unity in our heart, when we are at one and at peace with ourselves, we experience Advaita (undivided experience). Then our consciousness, freed from the shackles of disunity, moves upwards in an experience of elation or "high". It is an experience that is always new and at the same time like an old friend or a long-forgotten treasure.

This unexpected surge of happiness fills our heart with a sense of wonder, astonishment and awe at our own experience, causing us to forget the divisive barriers between ourselves and the World. In that state, as happiness bursts our self-imposed limitations and rushes to meet the World, we feel like embracing the World because we feel one with it. And the "higher" we feel, the more open we become to the World.

Now, if we allowed this experience to unfold and grow so strong as to overwhelm our mind and render it incapable of interfering, then nothing could prevent us from continuing our journey of ascent to instantly reach the Highest Consciousness, or for Consciousness to reach Its Highest Point of Experience. Since Consciousness is One, since the whole of reality consists of Consciousness and nothing else, this would of course constitute an experience of Unity, of Absolute, Infinite Undividedness or Undivided Oneness (Advaita). This is the definition of Advaita. It is also the definition of Yoga.

The Highest Experience, therefore, is that which Consciousness has of Itself as an Infinite, Unified Ocean of Intelligence and Bliss. From this perspective of Absolute Unity, there is no other Reality apart from Consciousness Itself. An essential point to assimilate as a minimum requirement for authentic Spiritual progress is that: (a) Consciousness is the Only Reality and (b) Consciousness is That which is aware of Itself. Since Consciousness is the force whereby we elevate ourselves to higher stages of experience, we cannot gain access to those higher states unless and until we have understood the nature and function of Consciousness.

In this context, the two main functions or powers of Consciousness or Self-Aware Reality, are: Unity and Awareness. Unity is that power whereby Consciousness holds Itself and Its Contents together in a unified act of awareness. Awareness is the power whereby Consciousness experiences Its own unity and that of the multitude of Its contents, whatever these may happen to be at any moment in time (or instance of experience).

The reality of the just described facts is clearly reflected, for example, in human language. Both the Latin-derived English word "Consciousness" and its Sanskrit counterpart, "Samvid", bear the same connotations. They are also similar in structure. Thus, they both consist of a prefix (con-, sam-) suggestive of fulness or wholeness as in complete (sampurna) and unity as in conjoin (sambandh), etc. and a basic stem (sciousness, vid) that denotes knowledge or experience (from Latin scire, Sanskrit vid, to know, experience, be aware). Since spoken language is but an outer expression of inner thought processes, it follows that all thinking beings implicitly admit that Consciousness (Samvid) is the totality of knowledge or experience - and the awareness thereof - either in an individual conscious entity, in a group of such entities, or in the Universe as a whole. Moreover, Consciousness is not only the totality of experience but also the unitive force that brings this experience about. What must be clear therefore is that, far from being a mere abstract notion, Consciousness is the very essence of being as without Consciousness we would be quite incapable of awareness, experience and ultimately, life.

Having acquired some conception of what is meant by Consciousness, we may now briefly analyse its relation to Yoga. Regardless of what Yoga is taken to mean in the West, the fact is that in the Sanskrit language, the term "Yoga" is capable of a wide range of meaning being often employed in contexts that lie well outside the scope accorded to it by non-Sanskrit speakers. In this sense, Yoga has three basic levels of meaning:

1. Universal Unity.
2. Process or activity leading to Universal Unity.
3. Any state, condition, or experience of unity and the means, process or activity leading to it.

1. Universal Unity. We have already observed that Consciousness is the only Reality. To be sure, this is a bold statement which, as the Key Teaching of Yoga, clearly puts our tradition in a unique position among the World's great religious and Spiritual systems. The legitimate question that arises here, is whether this statement is true and by what means this truth may be verified.

Without entering upon a detailed philosophical, religious, or scientific analysis of the matter, we can easily establish our position as follows. First, the statement in question is supported by the three universally accepted criteria of knowledge: **scriptural evidence** which is the testimony of Self-Realised Yogis, **reason** or logic and **direct Yogic experience**. (For a more detailed definition of these, see Yogic Criteria of Knowledge.) It also offers an elegant answer to a number of fundamental questions concerning reality. And

it concords with the unity of life. Second, any attempt to refute our position would run into a very serious problem. Our opponent would be forced to posit the existence of a reality or substance other than Consciousness and to explain the exact nature and function of such reality as well as its relation to Consciousness Itself. This is a task which, to our knowledge, nobody so far has been able to satisfactorily carry out. That Consciousness is a creative force, can be seen from the fact that it generates thought and action, the two most fundamental ingredients to life. By contrast, it is not apparent how physical or biological matter can give rise to Consciousness. In short, while our position not only concords with Yogic experience but also answers a deep psychological need present in all humans for a unified experience of life, the opponent's position evidently generates more problems than it purports to solve.

In religious terms, this Spiritual truth of Consciousness as the only Reality means that the World is created by and has its existence within the One Universal Consciousness, or God's Mind. In Yoga, God is not a personal deity - although He may assume such a form for the benefit of genuine Seekers. In the experience of Enlightened Yogis, God is an Infinite Universal Being Who holds within Itself all beings and things as manifestations of Its own Creative Intelligence. For this reason, the Sanskrit-speaking Yogis of India traditionally refer to God as **Shiva**, meaning That Which holds everything within Itself as the Reality upon Which all things depend and in Which all things rest (from **Shi**, to lie, rest) and by Whose power everything moves (from **Va**, to move).

At the highest level, then, Yoga is Universal Unity. It is the Universal Being's Awareness of Its Own Oneness and Uniqueness. There is only one Universal or Supreme Being. And the Awareness the Universal Being, Shiva, or God has of Itself as Infinite Oneness and Unity, is itself Unity, that is, Yoga.

However hard people may try, however many passages they may quote from the Bible or other books, however many tricks they may employ from religion, philosophy, psychology, logic, physics, mathematics and what not, they will *never* find a Truth higher than this. The Highest Truth is God's Awareness of Himself as a beginningless, eternal, unique, infinite, all-embracing and all-encompassing Ocean of Light, Intelligence and Creative Energy, Whose sensation is boundless Freedom, unconditional Love and endless Joy. This is Yoga, this is the Highest Truth.

In fact, Yoga is not "just" the Highest Truth, it is the *Only* Truth. Indeed, anything that represents a deviation or distraction from Yoga or the Universal Being's Awareness of Its Own Unity, is necessarily less than the Truth. Whatever we do, whatever we say, whatever we feel, think, or experience, cannot be Reality unless and until it is based on, and experienced from, the position of the Highest Truth, from the very Heart of the Universal Being Itself. This is why *all* our experiences come and go whereas the only eternal and *real* Experience is the awareness of ourselves as the Universal Being. Once we have attained this Experience, once we have *become* this Experience, that is, *we have become one with Shiva or God*, nothing can be real except ourselves as Universal Unity.

2. And so we arrive at the second level of meaning, that is, of Yoga as a means whereby the human Soul attains complete Union or Unity with the Supreme Being. Although in human opinion, the quest for a Higher Truth or attempt to come closer to God is entirely a person's own effort, from a higher perspective all such effort is in fact an activity of the Deity Itself acting through the personal Soul. This effort, activity, or process is a function of Consciousness. It is a manifestation of the power the Universal Consciousness (God's Mind) has of being or becoming aware of Itself. And since this self-reflective activity is a form of Unity, it is called Yoga.

On this level, therefore, Yoga is any activity by which the individual Soul comes closer to, or becomes aware of, or unites itself with, the Universal Soul. Or, from a different perspective, that activity through which the Universal Soul brings Itself closer to Itself, becomes aware of Itself, or unites Itself with Itself. In consequence, genuine Yoga is a purely Spiritual endeavour that does not necessarily require any of the physical practices that are passed for Yoga in the West.

3. And now, the third and last level of meaning. As mentioned earlier, the Sanskrit term "Yoga" may be employed to denote a process, situation, or device that joins, binds, or keeps things together or whole, including any thing, action, etc. whereby a person realises, and is united with the object of, his intention or desire: the harnessing of horses or other animals of traction; the mixing of various materials; an agreement between two persons; co-operation; protection; safe keeping; insurance; the astronomical conjunction of celestial bodies or constellations; the arithmetical addition of numbers; the grammatical connection of words together; the use of substances held to possess healing properties; a feat of magic; the application or concentration of thoughts; devotion; Spiritual search after Truth, etc. Although we cannot here do more than sample the truly impressive variety of meaning of which the word Yoga is capable, it may be regarded as sufficient for the purposes of our present consideration.

What becomes evident, is that it would be neither unreasonable nor inconsistent with the linguistic evidence, to extend this already vast spectrum of conventional meaning to *all* phenomenon, activity, process, device, situation, or intention, involved partly or wholly in producing or preserving a state of unity or wholeness between two or more objects or beings or within the same one object or being. In this sense, any instance of magnetism, gravity, cohesion, attraction, contact, fusion, or assimilation, may be legitimately termed Yoga or Unity. Thus, the force or forces that hold the Universe together or uphold the process by which a raindrop falls to earth, joins the sea with a stream and finally returns to the sky with the mist and clouds, must be admitted to be aspects or manifestations of Yoga as defined above.

In terms of everyday life, Yoga, Unity, or Advaita may be experienced, for example, when we lie down to rest and physically feel at one with our bed. When we dream, we experience unity with our mind. When we go into a deep, dreamless sleep, we experience unity with our Soul. When we awaken from sleep in the morning, we rest in that inner unity for a while. We then collect our thoughts and remember, in another act of unity, the tasks that lie ahead for the day. When we open our eyes, we make contact or unity with the outer World. When we look in the mirror, we make contact or unity with the reflection of our external appearance.

When taking a shower or bath, we make unity with water. When we dress, we make unity with our clothes. When we sit down, we make unity with the chair we sit on. When we eat or drink, we make unity with the food or liquid we ingest. When we listen to the radio, to the birds singing or the wind blowing outside, we make unity with the sounds we hear. When we go out of the house, we make unity with the street we walk on. We inhale, and make unity with air. At work, we again experience unity in the harmonious co-operation with our colleagues and the production of work. When we speak, we unite different speech sounds into words, words into sentences and sentences into a coherent conversation. Again, thinking of somebody we love, talking to him or embracing him is an act of unity with that person just as thinking of God is unity with Higher Truth, although the latter case would take us to a higher level and hence belongs to Yoga proper, that is, Yoga as a means of higher experience.

On the present level and in strictly human terms, unity may be experienced on three basic sublevels: physical, mental and Spiritual. Physical unity refers to purely physical contact with another body or physical object with minimal or no emotional or intellectual involvement. Mental unity is that which concerns primarily our emotions and thoughts, especially when two minds feel or think the same as in non-verbal, intuitive or telepathic communication. Spiritual unity is the situation or condition in which two Souls experience each other directly, that is, without the mediation of the mind.

In the light of these considerations, what must be beyond dispute, is that Unity - whether we call it Yoga, Advaita or anything else - is a reality that pervades all levels of existence, from the Supreme Principle to subatomic particles, as the very foundation and essence of life. This fact is of particular importance in view of the objection that has been raised time and again, to the effect that the Yogis' insistence upon Consciousness as the only reality may be conducive to an attitude of irresponsible indifference to the World.

As we have just demonstrated, Unity is an all-pervading function of Consciousness which is Itself an all-pervading reality. As a Spiritual process, Yoga concerns itself with the expansion of Consciousness, of the

awareness of the Unity of all life. Now, if Self-Realisation or Enlightenment - the end result of Yoga - is a conscious expansion of awareness, intelligence and knowledge at all levels, which it must be in order to constitute a truly non-dual, all-inclusive reality, then it must also be an expansion of interest and compassion. It follows from this, that Fully Enlightened Consciousness as defined here, while grounded in Absolute Reality, is aware of, and cares about, relative aspects of reality, including body-mind structures, both "its own" and those belonging to "others".

This fact becomes obvious if we consider that an Enlightened Yogi is not a limited physical body but an unlimited field of intelligent energy (or active intelligence) that has the capacity to interact with other, similar or dissimilar fields of intelligence in ways and on levels that are not always immediately apparent to outsiders. In general, it may be said that even when externally appearing to be inactive or even indifferent, Yogis are in fact available to men on levels of consciousness where help, protection and guidance really matters. Indeed, it must be beyond dispute that without the help and guidance of Yogis, the World would be a very different place.

The real issue is not the insistence upon Consciousness as the only reality, but the incomplete realisation (Spiritual, mental and physical) of its implications. This is evidenced by an occasional apparent detachment from or "rejection" of the World in the incipient stages of Spiritual endeavour as opposed to the World-embracing attitude of Fully Enlightened Consciousness. The former therefore can only be a temporary phase in a process that ultimately leads to the latter and must be understood as such by the discerning minds.

In the same way as a person, when tired, will temporarily withdraw from the World and go to sleep in order to better enjoy the World upon waking, so also, a genuine follower of Yoga will detach himself from the World only for the purpose of embracing a Higher Reality which, once thus embraced, enables him to accept the World in a way he was previously incapable of. If the results are less than satisfactory, it is not the approach but the would-be Yogi who is not genuine or in more charitable terms, not fit or ready for higher stages of experience. But then the same may be said to apply equally, if not more so, to the outside critics who imagine themselves in a position to pass judgement on Spiritual matters on the basis of someone else's (or their own) misunderstandings.

There is one last, but no less important, reason why the objection in question must be dismissed as unfounded. Those who are disappointed by some Yogis' apparent lack of concern for the problems of the World, are free to seek assistance from a Higher Power. If we expect Yogis to help us, then surely we must expect the Deity or God Force to be even more capable and willing to offer assistance. If, on the other hand, even God seems unable or unwilling to help, it would be unreasonable to criticise the Yogis for the same perceived failure. The truth of the matter is that, bluntly put, God is neither a nanny nor a string puppet and cannot be reasonably expected to act like one. Logically speaking, it cannot be God's intention for humans to be childishly dependent on Him. As the ancient scriptures declare: From the Gods down to a blade of grass, the World is created for the benefit of the Soul, until Supreme Knowledge is attained. What the Spiritually inexperienced perceive as obstacles, may in fact be means of attaining final independence or emancipation.

The whole issue then, may be reduced to three fundamental principles:

1. A Yogi who is ignorant of or indifferent to the problems of his fellow humans, cannot be supposed to be an Enlightened Being.
2. The Universal Consciousness (God) and Enlightened Yogis who exist in a condition of absolute Unity with It (and the World) are naturally aware of and care about the problems of the World.
3. If the Universal Consciousness or an Enlightened Yogi who acts in absolute Unity with It, appears to be unresponsive to a person's needs - whatever these may be - this is not due to indifference but to higher reasons that always work in the interests of the person concerned whose duty is to endeavour to acquire a deeper understanding of these reasons.

Generally speaking, problems of the kind just considered can only arise out of an insufficient knowledge of reality that leads to gross misinterpretations of situations and facts, not excluding the teachings of Yoga itself. For example, the notion of the World as an illusion, is an apt illustration of this situation. The original and authentic Yogic teaching is not that the World is an illusion but that it is *like* an illusion: first, because it ultimately consists of Consciousness, being created by the Universal Being not from some physical substance but out of Consciousness Itself, in other words, seemingly "out of nothing" as if by magic - which is why, in Yoga, the Creator who is normally referred to as Ishvara or Shiva (God) is also called the Great Magician (Maha Mayin): This Whole World the Divine Magician projects out of Unmanifested Reality...etc.; second, because ordinary perception of the World is limited and distorted and hence "illusory" (though not the World itself) - one only needs to think of the multitude of projections the Spiritually untutored mind superimposes on reality; and third, because it captivates the spectator in much the same way as a magician's feat, rendering him oblivious to a higher reality.

It is therefore imperative not to be deceived by external appearances or by the opinion of those who are incognizant of Spiritual matters. It will be helpful in this context to have some understanding of the mechanism through which incorrect information comes to be circulated as authentic Spiritual knowledge. The fact is that as an all-pervading Reality and Inner Soul of all things, the Supreme Being is already present everywhere in different and innumerable forms and shapes. In consequence, It cannot be expected to descend even more to man's level. That is not the purpose of the Universe. Its intention and purpose is to point to a Higher Reality by striving for which, man can elevate himself to the Supreme Being's own level of experience.

The root of the problem is that, although Truth is communicated to man quite directly and clearly, literally every moment of his life, it usually reaches him in ways and by channels that are less than direct and clear, due to his undeveloped capacity of Spiritual perception. Yoga recognises three fundamental forms of Spiritual Revelation or Transmission of Higher Intelligence as accountable for the great diversity of Spiritual and religious traditions in the World:

1. Revelations that are genuine communications of the Universal Mind and are correctly interpreted or understood and implemented by the recipient individual or group of individuals.
2. Revelations that are genuine communications of the Universal Mind but are, in part or in whole, incorrectly interpreted, understood or implemented by the recipient individual (or group of individuals).
3. Revelations that are entirely the product of the individual mind and therefore, however well-intentioned they may be, do not count as genuine, properly speaking.

As most religious and Spiritual traditions in existence today are not direct communications of a Higher Intelligence but are man-made, even the initially genuine ones having passed through many hands (and minds), they may safely be assumed to belong to the second and third classes described. As for those belonging to the first class, they nowadays are extremely rare and normally unavailable to uninitiated outsiders. This in itself is an alarming thought. However, since Spiritual intelligence acts like a force that attracts another Spiritual intelligence, a genuine Spiritual Seeker will sooner or later find the Truth no matter how many mountains of un-Truth lie on top of it. As for the rest, they evidently are not yet ready to receive the Truth and will unfortunately have to wait until they have reached a higher degree of Spiritual maturity. This is just the way things are. What is of interest to us is that the first level of transmission or revelation is conducive to Unity or Non-duality (Advaita) whereas the second and third levels invariably lead to dvaita (duality, division, disunity).

This, however, must not be taken to mean that duality is always and in all circumstances negative. The World of multiplicity can be quite enjoyable. On this point, the sacred texts of India declare: In the Beginning, the Supreme Being, the One without a second, was One; being One, He desired to be Many...thus the All-Creator, the One God, established all things. Far from being a mere illusion or the product of ignorance as some have suggested, the World is in fact a positive expression of the Universal Will and the Manifestation of God's Infinite Glory.

Yet for the World to exist in the form known to man, duality is an essential ingredient. We must be able to perceive difference in order to see the World as it is. There cannot be anything wrong about duality or multiplicity in itself, since the Universal Being Itself willed it to be so. Indeed, if nothing else, multiplicity can have an aesthetic value. The problem arises if and to the extent that we perceive duality to the exclusion of Unity. Just as there wouldn't be much use in registering different points of perception in the absence of the capacity of unifying them into one coherent picture, the perception of distinct and separate things without the capacity for experiencing everything against the background of the all-pervading, unifying essence of all life, would be a rather limited and unsatisfactory experience.

It is one thing to perceive and appreciate variation in colour, sound, taste, or any other sensory data that enable us, for example, to enjoy the golden orb of the Sun glowing against the blue expanse of the Sky, the different notes in a tune or even shape our own individuality and personality from different feelings and thoughts. It is quite another to define ourselves exclusively in terms of difference from others and the World. The fact is that Consciousness is an intelligent force that needs its freedom so that its capacity for experiencing happiness, that is, for being its true, happy self, may unfold and find expression. There can hardly be anything more productive of psychological disharmony and imbalance than constant repetition of rigid, difference-centred thinking, which is what standard thinking is. Such thinking invariably leads to neurosis and other psychological conditions unless it is tempered by a broader and more unitive worldview.

Indeed, psychological conditions are so prevalent in modern, materialistic society that they often become the driving force behind what is officially promoted as "harmless" artistic expression, emotional commitment, political conviction, religious faith, professional ambition, economic interest or strategic necessity. It cannot be entirely a matter of chance that an ever-growing number of people from all social and cultural backgrounds are attracted to the unique teachings of the absolute unity of life that Yoga offers. In the majority of cases, the reason is primarily a psychological and only secondarily a Spiritual one.

It is clear from what has gone before, that there is no intrinsic necessity for duality, differentiation, or multiplicity to result in a restriction of Consciousness. Consciousness is by definition a free and independent intelligent energy. As such it has the capacity to experience both unity and disunity simultaneously. What disunity and its consequences are is well-known to all. What is now urgently needed is Unity. The human race can only have a future in unity and co-operation. This is why Yoga (Advaita) as the Spirituality of Unity must and will become the Spirituality of the Future. As an expression of the Universal Being's Infinite Will-Power, Yoga will no doubt succeed in its noble task of unifying and uplifting the whole of Mankind. For this reason we hereby invite you to join the World Yoga Movement for Unity (see F.A.Q. 25: [How to become a Yogi](#)).

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 13

YOGA AND BUDDHISM

QUESTION: What is the relation between Yoga and Buddhism? I am asking this because although Buddhism is usually promoted as a distinct system, it evidently has much in common with Yoga. Also, you are saying that the Buddha himself belonged to the Yoga Tradition.

ANSWER: As often happens with truth, the truth about the nature and origins of Buddhism has been much obscured by clouds of ignorance and propaganda. Some enquirers are even convinced that Buddhism is a Chinese, Japanese or Tibetan tradition!

To begin with its country of origin. There is no doubt that Buddhism has been adopted (often as the state religion) by many Eastern nations, and that down the centuries forms of Buddhism have evolved which may be described as Chinese, Japanese or Tibetan. However, even a superficial knowledge of history will show that its roots are to be found in India, where it came into being as an offshoot of the Yoga Tradition.

According to scriptural and other historical evidence, Lord Buddha was born Siddharta Gautama, in the year 563 BC, in North India. He subsequently became known by the various titles of Shramana Shakyaputra (The Ascetic of the Shakya Clan), Tathagata (He Who Has Thus Arrived), Sugata (He Who Has Passed On To Happiness), Bhagavan (The Blessed One), and finally, the Buddha (The Awakened or Wise One). As far as Buddhism itself is concerned, it has been said by some that this tradition is somehow different from that of Yoga.

In particular, it has been claimed that the Buddha taught the non-existence of the Soul or Self. In our view, this is a gross misrepresentation of facts. Even in those times, there were some who believed in the Self and others who rejected its existence. As it often happens with great teachers, both groups attempted to use the Buddha's teachings to support their own views. As the Buddhist Scriptures were not written by the Buddha himself but by his supposed followers who lived centuries after his time, not all material that has come down to us can be accepted as the Buddha's exact words. In our search for truth we must, above all, avoid such elements of Scripture that appear to be incoherent, contradictory and elaborate, and concentrate on what is clear, simple and easy to understand.

What is certain is that the Buddha himself was not a man given to philosophical debate. When one of his disciples was asked about his Master's opinion, he replied, "My Master holds no opinion". As the eminent historian of religion Professor Mircea Eliade, has pertinently observed, the Buddha did not deny the existence of the Self but the possibility of knowing the Self through thought and discussion. Not that thinking about or discussing the nature of the Self were in and of itself something to be shunned, but it must not be indulged in - as some are inclined to do - at the expense of more direct means of knowledge such as meditation and intuition. Indeed, the Buddha's teachings on this subject may be summed up as follows: It is wrong to say that the Self is, and it is wrong to say that the Self is not; what is right is to practise diligently; for it is through practice that man becomes an Awakened One (Buddha). (It is in full agreement with the Yoga Tradition to answer complex questions either with silence or by stating that something is neither this nor that - "neti, neti" - that is to say, the object under discussion must be found in the domain of direct experience that lies beyond mental concepts and verbal articulation.)

Becoming Awakened is the key message of Buddhism and this presupposes the existence of a higher truth within ourselves (otherwise, who is to awaken to what?). The fact is that one of the Buddha's most striking statements was "Be yourself your own guiding lamp" which clearly implies the existence of at least two Selves, one that is to be guided and one that functions as a guide. Another one of his central teachings was that, upon Enlightenment, "the Self becomes one with the Supreme" (Anguttara-Nikaya, 2, 206). In other words, the Self (or Soul), far from being considered illusory, denied or rejected, is to become One with the Highest Reality and thereby become eminently Real.

Let us briefly investigate the nature and function of the Self. On strict logic, since human experience is momentary, that is, sense perceptions, emotions, thoughts and our awareness thereof arise and subside all the time, there must be a permanent, changeless principle within us, by referring to which we register change in other things (such as sense perceptions, emotions, etc.). This principle must possess consciousness and intelligence to be aware of experiences as well as to refer these to each other and to itself. The same principle or entity must also hold within itself, and recall, the impressions of past experiences thereby providing everyday life with continuity, coherence and meaning. Even the Buddha could not have denied the logical necessity of such a permanent, changeless principle or entity.

The confusion regarding the existence or otherwise of the Self stems from the fact that the Self has various aspects. First, there is the Unborn, Self-Existing Universal Self who is, by definition, Eternal. Second, there is the individual Self (or Soul) who is permanent in the sense that it continues to exist from life to life until it merges into and becomes One with, the Universal Self. And third, what is ordinarily regarded as self, that is, the stream of experience consisting of ever-rising, ever-subsiding perceptions, emotions and thoughts, which man erroneously identifies with in everyday life. It is this mind-created, everyday self that on closer investigation proves to be impermanent and therefore "non-existent", from a higher perspective. Yet even this self, immaterial and transient though it may be, must be admitted to exist as a temporary experience even if not as a *permanent* reality.

The reason why the Buddha sometimes asserted that the Self did not exist was simply because he was referring to the impermanent, quasi-illusory self described above, and because he wished to force the enquirer to seek, and take refuge in, a Higher Reality: the Unborn, the Unmade, Self-Existing Supreme Truth of the Enlightened Condition (Nirvana). What is beyond doubt is that the Buddha did admit the existence of an Immortal Principle (Amarta Dhatu) which he referred to as the "Unbecome, Unborn, Unmade, Unformed", whereby in his own words, "there is escape from that which is become, born, made, and formed". Far from implying nothingness, this suggests the existence of a Transcendental Reality that lies beyond the reach of the human mind. And if such a Reality exists, then there must also be an Intelligence there to experience it.

The Dhammapada, a traditional collection of Buddha's sayings, declares: "The Sun shines by day, the Moon shines by night, the Warrior shines in his armour, the Religious Man shines in his meditation, but the Awakened One shines at all times by his (own) radiance" (387). Since a thing that does not exist can hardly be said to be Awakened, or to shine at any time or in any way, it becomes evident that an Enlightened (or Awakened) being shines by virtue of his own Conscious Self, and that the existence of this Self is implicitly admitted by the Buddha whose words the just given quotation is said by his followers to represent.

In contrast to the conventional, everyday self, the Self of Enlightenment, of Buddhahood, of Nirvana, *must* be Eternal as otherwise there would be no escape from the ever-changing experience of worldly existence. Now, one of the definitions of Yoga (as given in the Yoga Sutra 1:2) is "the arrest of mental fluctuations". This is precisely the definition of Buddhist Salvation: Non-Moving (Nirvana), Non-Agitation (Akshobha). Furthermore, in the days of the Buddha, Yoga was already an ancient Spiritual path and (in the Samyatta-Nikaya, 2, 106) the Buddha says, "I have seen the Ancient Way and followed it". Indeed, according to the Buddhist tradition, prior to his Enlightenment the Buddha spent six years practising with Yogis in the forest.

It is clear therefore that Yoga - the main teaching of which is the existence of an Eternal Supreme Self - is the path followed by the Buddha, and his followers were well aware of the fact that the relation between the Buddhist and Yoga tradition was one of identity in both theory and practice. So much so, that the Buddhist work Samanta-Padasika (Vin. A. pp. 145-6), for example, defines Meditation (Dhyana or Jhana, later known as Ch'an or Zen outside India) which is central to both Yoga and Buddhism, as "that by which Yogis think (or contemplate reality)". Indeed, Buddhist Scriptures frequently refer to a person who practises Meditation as "Yogi" or "Yogavachara" (One Who Practises Yoga or Walks In The Way of Yoga). Moreover, the followers of an influential Buddhist movement originated in the first centuries of the current era, called themselves "Yogachara" that is, "Followers Of The Yoga Path". This would have been unthinkable, had Yoga and Buddhism been two different and conflicting traditions.

Finally, in the Dhammapada (The Path of Righteousness), the Buddha himself says: "Through Yoga Wisdom arises; without Yoga Wisdom is lost" (282). This in itself is sufficient to establish our position. The only objection that may be raised here is that the word Yoga in Buddhist terminology may simply mean meditation. However, since meditation is the central practice of Yoga whereby, moreover, the Buddha himself attained the state of Enlightenment, any distinction between Yoga as meditation and Yoga as Spiritual Practice must be admitted to be conceptual rather than actual. As the Supreme Lord Himself declares: "Yoga is the concentration of the mind upon Me (the Supreme Reality)" (See the Shiva Purana, Vayaviya Samhita II, 10:33). In consequence, on the basis of the evidence at hand, we must regard it as an established fact that the teachings of the Buddha are essentially identical with the teachings of Yoga and that original Buddhism was not different from, but clearly belonged to, the timeless Yoga Tradition itself.

By extension, the same applies to Hinduism and related traditions (Jainism, Sikhism, etc.). It is important to remember that Yoga is a Way of Life that is inspired by the desire to live in Unity with Truth. As such, Yoga is the essence of all religious, scientific and Spiritual effort and the very foundation of all faiths. Yoga, therefore, must be admitted to be the True Religion. All other faiths are true to the extent to which they agree with Yoga and false to the extent that they disagree. Agreement or otherwise with Yoga, therefore, is the best criterion for determining the truthfulness of any faith. Since both Hinduism and

Buddhism agree with Yoga, indeed, regard Yoga as the means of attaining to Truth, they must be admitted to be true. It is not mere coincidence that Yoga, Hinduism and Buddhism traditionally refer to themselves as **Dharma**, that is, the World-Supporting Divine Law and True Religion of which all other faiths are mere variations or digressions.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 14

WHO IS A YOGI?

QUESTION: What is the correct definition of a Yogi?

ANSWER: The Sanskrit word "Yoga" means "Unity with the Supreme Being". A Yogi, therefore, is one who either has attained, or is striving to attain, the state of Unity with the Supreme.

However, in order for a course of action to lead to the desired result, it must be based on certain facts. In practice, therefore, in his quest for Unity with the Supreme, a Yogi must embrace, and act on, the following Spiritual facts:

1. There is One Supreme Being (Shiva or God) Whose Essence is Pure Goodness.

Explanation: Yoga believes in a Supreme God Who is called Shiva (Good, Auspicious, Beneficent) because He embodies everything that is Good (Shivam): Truth, Beauty, Goodness, Love, Justice and Compassion.

2. Though being Eternally One, the Supreme Being manifests Himself in many ways.

Explanation: Life has many different aspects or facets, like a crystal that reflects light in many different colours. Similarly, Shiva Who is the Lord of Life, manifests Himself in many different ways. The whole Universe, from the Gods down to a blade of grass, is a manifestation of God's Supreme Majesty and Glory.

3. All things are created by the Supreme Being out of Himself and to Him they ultimately return.

Explanation: As the World is a Manifestation of God's Glory, it cannot be made out of nothing. Nor can it be made from a substance other than God. For, firstly, there is no reality apart from God and, secondly, even if such reality existed, it couldn't match the Glory of God. The World therefore is made of God's Own Luminous Essence in the same way as the day is made of the Sun's own radiance.

Furthermore, because God is the Ground of all things, all things come into being in, and return to, the All-supporting and All-encompassing Ground, just as stars appear and disappear in the same Sky.

4. All things have an Inner Soul who is essentially identical with the Supreme.

Explanation: Because all created things are a Manifestation of God's Own Glory, they all carry a spark of Divine Light within themselves. This spark is called Soul (Atma) who is the True Man as opposed to mind, body and physical possessions.

5. The Universe is governed by the Creator through His Supreme Eternal Law (Sanatana Dharma).

Explanation: Everybody can see that there is a certain Order in the World. What not everybody can see, however, is that this World Order is upheld by certain principles or laws which philosophers, religious authorities and scientists have been studying for millennia. In Yoga, the sum total of universal principles or laws whereby everything is held together and governed by the Supreme Being, is called the Supreme Eternal Law.

6. Salvation, Freedom from Suffering and True Happiness are attained by adhering to Divine Law (Dharma).

Explanation: In the same way as the Universe is held together and kept in order by the Eternal Law of the Universe so also, man's life can become a source of happiness and fulfilment by following the same Law. Disregarding this Law, on the other hand, leads to pain and suffering.

7. Supreme Salvation is attained when a Soul becomes God-like (Shiva-sama) and experiences Unity with the Supreme.

Explanation: Human beings suffer due to the fact that they perceive themselves as different and separate from God. This erroneous perception causes them to act in ways that are contrary to Divine Law, thus reinforcing this experience of division and the resultant feelings of isolation, confusion, fear, etc. All this suffering comes to an end the moment man realises that he is made of the same essence as God and begins to act like a Divine Being.

It is essential to understand at this point that there are various degrees of Salvation, Enlightenment, or Freedom from Suffering. In general, Yoga recognises five such stages known as: Salokya, Sannidya, Sarupya, Sayujya and Sarshti.

In the first type of Salvation (Salokya-Moksha), the Soul takes up residence in Heaven, in the presence of God. This stage is described in the Quran, the Holy Book of Islam, where it is said that those who go to Heaven enjoy themselves in the presence of a great King (presumably God). It is the reward of those who led a righteous life while on Earth. In the second stage (Sannidya-Moksha), the Soul draws nearer to God and lives close to Him. It is enjoyed by Souls who lived their lives in close Unity with God, without experiencing Identity with Him, such as Prophets and Saints. This is described in the Christian Bible where it is said that Jesus sits at the right hand of God.

In the third stage (Sarupya-Moksha), the Souls who realise their Divine Nature, acquire the form of Divine Beings such as Angels or Gods. This stage is described in the Scriptures of Ancient Egypt. In the fourth stage (Sayujya-Moksha), the Souls merge into the Supreme Being, as described in the Holy Scriptures of Hinduism.

In the final and highest stage (Sarshti-Moksha), the Soul having become One with God, enjoys the same Divine Powers as God Himself. This is the stage described by the Holy Scriptures of Yoga. Thus the Souls who through a righteous life have gained entrance to Heaven, must turn to higher forms of Spirituality in order to attain the Highest, Eternal Salvation of Shiva (Shiva-Nirvana). Those who adhere to lower forms of religion either are denied entrance to Heaven or, having entered, may still fall to lower planes of existence.

This is only natural if we consider that so long as a feeling of difference and separation from God persists, it will provide a gate of entrance for further divisive thoughts and actions, which will eventually bring about the Soul's fall. For this reason, it is written that, "Having had enjoyment in Heaven, they re-enter this World or a lower" (Mundaka Upanishad).

8. The means of attaining Supreme Salvation are Spiritual Practice and the Grace of God.

Explanation: Spiritual Practice is the means whereby man allows the Light of God to enter his life that he may see the right path and know the right actions from the wrong ones. However, developing an interest in Spiritual Practice, as well as persevering and attaining success in the same, ultimately depend upon the Grace of God.

9. The journey to Unity with the Supreme requires many lifetimes to complete.

Explanation: It is a matter of commonsense experience that an imperfect being like man, cannot become perfect in just one lifetime. In order to become Perfect and fit for life in the Presence of God, man must undergo a long process of life and rebirth. In consequence, the teachings of other faiths, to the effect that adherence to them results in automatic and permanent entrance to Heaven, are wrong. They must be rejected as dangerous and harmful to the Soul's Spiritual welfare.

10. The Practice of Yoga can shorten this Spiritual Journey to just one lifetime.

Explanation: The conscious and deliberate effort of a person to become perfect can bring about Perfection (or Godhood, Shivatva) in a much shorter time than in the natural course of ordinary life. This conscious and deliberate, Spiritual effort, is called Yoga (Union) because it brings about Unity and Identity with the Supreme.

11. All living beings are responsible for their own actions and are capable of experiencing pleasure or pain as a result of such actions.

Explanation: All religions admit that every man is accountable for his own actions. In Yoga, this accountability is called Karma. Karma is both the action (karma) performed by a person and its effect or reward (karma-phala).

Generally speaking, Karma may be said to be of two kinds: good or white (shukla) and bad or black (krishna). Actions done in accordance with Universal Law constitute Good Karma and result in happiness. Actions done in breach of Universal Law constitute Bad Karma and result in suffering.

Although man is responsible for his own actions, it is God Who ultimately determines the reward or punishment for all human agency. He also arranges suitable bodies and circumstances necessary for the enjoyment or suffering warranted by human actions. Karma may also be individual or collective. When different people belonging to a unity such as family, religious community or nation experience similar circumstances at the same time, this is an example of collective Karma, even though the actions that attracted or brought about those circumstances may individually differ.

Karma may also result through association in thought, word and deed. Thus association with righteous people may result in good or white Karma (shukla karma) whereas association with anti-Spiritual elements may result in bad or black Karma (krishna karma).

12. God shows Mankind the Path to Happiness and Freedom from Pain through Direct Revelation, Sacred Scriptures and the Teachings of Living Gurus.

Explanation: God is Truth (Satyam). He is the Eternal Light of Reality. Therefore, as the Sun always shines upon the World, God perpetually shines in all His Glory upon His Creation. Due to variations in the Souls' capacity of perception, the Light of God is perceived differently by different people. While some have a clear perception of Truth, others have to content themselves with a dim, hazy, blurred or obscured vision of the same.

While some are granted a direct perception of Truth, others have to rely on secondary sources such as Scriptures and the teachings of Spiritual Leaders. What is important, however, is that the World is never

without Divine Guidance. While God fulfils His Duty of Supreme Spiritual Teacher and Guide, man must also make an effort to find a reliable source of Truth according to his abilities.

A person who embraces, understands and correctly follows these twelve principles, qualifies as a Yogi. For more information see [How to become a Yogi](#).

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 15

PRINCIPLES OF YOGIC DIET

QUESTION: Does Yoga prescribe any dietary rules?

ANSWER: In an ideal situation, all human beings ought to eat what is beneficial to their physical and Spiritual well-being. To understand what constitutes ideal food, we must first establish what food is. Although man may consume food for pleasure and other psychological reasons such as in the case of "comfort food", the main function of food is to provide the physical body with energy.

In the same way as everything we see has the fundamental qualities of Light and Darkness, Energy is also of two kinds: one that is elevating and expansive, known as **Luminosity (Sattva)** and one that is depressive and contractive, known as **Obscurity (Tamas)**. The interaction of these two energy forms produces a third one which is stimulating and dynamic, known as **Movement (Rajas)**.

As food consists of Energy, it too, has the capacity to promote luminous (sattvic), obscure (tamasic) or dynamic (rajasic) energy patterns in man. On his part, man who subsists on food, may be said to be of three kinds, according to the energy quality prevalent in each person.

Thus, the Holy Scriptures of India, describe **sattvic man** as possessing an inborn intuition of the One Reality that underlies all things. He is calm, stable, focused, self-controlled, happy, content, well-mannered, attracted to Spiritual Knowledge and keen to work for the welfare of others. The man of **rajasic character** has a worldview that is dominated by the superficial distinctiveness and separateness of things as opposed to their fundamental oneness and unity. He is attracted to sensual pleasures, unstable, restless, seldom happy except for brief moments and intent on his own ends. **Tamasic man** is described as being obsessed with one thing to the exclusion of all others, lazy, undisciplined, wanton, bad-mouthed and fond of quarrels, sleep and intoxicant substances.

What becomes evident is that pure or Spiritual food is conducive to Spiritual, uplifting energy patterns. An ideal, Yogic diet is one that consists of such food and is termed **Sattvic Diet**.

The following are some typical examples of the three classes of food:

Sattvic (Spiritual) Food is uplifting, promoting happiness and contentment, as well as mental alertness and clarity. Fruit, vegetables, green leaves, pulses, nuts, cereals, milk, yoghurt, natural cane sugar, unrefined vegetable oils as well as spices like ginger, cardamom, cinnamon, saffron and basil as well as beverages like fresh, natural fruit juices, belong to the **sattvic** or uplifting category. This is the ideal class of food, promoting mental and physical health and longevity. A **sattvic meal** normally consists of wheat, rice, barley or millet with lentils, beans or coconut, as well as some vegetables and fruit.

Rajasic (Stimulating and Affective) Food is stimulating, promoting an emotionally passionate and excitable disposition. Vegetable or animal (in particular saturated) fat such as margarine, butter, cheese and lard, refined sugar, sweets, eggs, fish, meat, spices like pepper, chillies, garlic, onion and cloves, beverages

like tea, coffee and alcoholic drinks (in small amounts) are classified as **rajasic** or stimulant. Rajasic food must be consumed in moderation. An excess of it can lead to aggression, mental and physical imbalance and disease.

NOTE: As with all other things, there is no universally valid measure - every person must find what is best for him. Alcohol consumption in particular must be limited to the minimum. While advanced Yogis have no need of alcohol, beginners may enjoy small amounts provided that it does not impair their thinking or bring about a change in their facial expression and voice - signs that the permitted quantity has been exceeded. Also, it ought to be restricted to festive occasions and not indulged in on a regular basis.

As far as coffee is concerned, it is important to understand that it is made from the burned seeds of the coffee shrub. It has no nutritional value whatsoever and cannot be regarded as food, properly speaking. Drinking coffee is in fact a bourgeois and materialistic pursuit that ought to be shunned by all Spiritual people. Regular intake thereof can lead to heart disease, memory loss, aggressive and violent moods and mental imbalance. Moreover, it encourages the oppression and exploitation of poor nations who could grow food for themselves instead of depending on other countries. The same applies to tea and chocolate.

Tamasic (Unspiritual) Food is sedative, promoting a sluggish disposition as well as mental dullness and opacity. All foods that are unpalatable, difficult to digest, too dry, too spicy, salty, burned, stale or toxic such as alcohol (in large amounts), condiments like nutmeg and poppy-seeds, are of a **tamasic** or dullish nature. Tamasic food not only has a stultifying effect on the mind but also represents a major contributing factor in the development of cancer and other fatal diseases.

As becomes evident from the above, the **Ideal Diet** requires that **sattvic food** be the main source of nutrition, with **rajasic food** taken only occasionally or in small amounts, while **tamasic food** is to be avoided as far as possible. Yogic diet therefore may be said to be basically **Vegetarian (Shakahari)**.

Yoga, however, also recognises the fact that the energy intake must correspond with the energy output. For this reason, those who dedicate themselves exclusively to a religious or Spiritual life such as Spiritual leaders, monks and priests, are generally expected to adhere to a strict **sattvic** diet. Others, however, whose occupation requires higher levels of physical energy, such as soldiers, workers and farmers, are permitted to take **rajasic** food, including meat, as required by each individual's specific circumstances.

Dharmic and Adharmic Food

Although, strictly speaking, meat is not sattvic or Spiritual food, it still constitutes permissible or lawful (**dharmic**) food, especially in the absence of other means of sustenance. Unlawful (**adharmic**) food, on the other hand, is not permitted to those who follow the Path of Yoga.

Unlawful (adharmic) food which is also known as **ninditanna (forbidden food)** is, firstly, that which is produced or obtained by illegal or immoral means such as theft, deception or cruelty. **The Holy Scriptures of India are very clear about the importance of the means whereby food is obtained either by oneself or by others.** Thus a Spiritual person must not accept food from criminals, sinners, moneylenders, arms traders, atheists and blasphemers.

In particular, food that has been prepared by Unspiritual people is forbidden to Yogis. Food that has been handled but not prepared by the same, on the other hand, is permitted in moderation. For example, raw vegetables or rice bought from an Unspiritual person (such as an Atheist, etc.) are lawful, but unlawful if they were cooked by that person.

By extension, we must include in this category food produced in countries that are known to promote atheism, false religions, terrorism or oppression (for example, China, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Iran and

Pakistan). Our objections are not directed at the people of these countries, but at their corrupt and irresponsible leaders who must be forced to abandon immoral and criminal practices.

In particular, food and other goods derived from countries that restrict and suppress Yoga must be avoided at all costs. Among these we may enumerate Morocco, Algeria, Egypt and Sudan, in addition to the five countries mentioned above.

Secondly, food that is prohibited for religious and practical reasons. Human flesh and that of human-like animals such as monkeys and apes, falls under this category. Further, the meat of certain other animals such as the cow, the horse, the elephant, the camel and the swan. We may observe that in India, apart from the great reverence they enjoy, cows are used for milk as well as for ploughing the fields and drawing carts; camels and horses are used for riding and elephants for hauling timber; swans are associated with the human Soul, etc. The meat of these animals must be regarded as taboo.

Those who deliberately or accidentally consume the meat of any of the above, are in a state of sinfulness and must atone by bathing in a holy river or temple bath, as well as by fasting, praying and giving alms to the poor.

Thirdly, **unlawful (adharmic) food** is that which is prohibited for medical or hygienic reasons. Apart from food that is chemically or physically contaminated, toxic or poisonous, the meat of certain animals, birds, reptiles and fishes falls under this category. In general, these are animals, etc., as subsist on other living things. Flesh-eating animals, birds and reptiles such as the vulture, the eagle, the owl, the hawk and the crow, the cat, the dog, the lion, the tiger, the leopard, the cheetah and snakes; fish-eating aquatic animals such as the whale, the dolphin, the alligator and the shark; insect-eating creatures like the swallow, the cuckoo and the lizard; and, finally, animals and birds such as pigs, chickens, geese and ducks that roam freely in the vicinity of human habitation (such as in villages) and may, due to their feeding habits, be potential carriers of disease. The deliberate or accidental consumption of such meat leaves one in a state of physical impurity the only remedy for which is bathing, fasting and eating pure, **sattvic** food.

Lawful (dharmic) food is: 1) that which is produced and obtained by lawful, that is, not illegal or immoral, means; 2) that which is not in breach of any religious taboos; and 3) that which does not contravene medical and hygienic considerations.

Apart from what has already been listed above under **sattvic** and **rajasic** food, the consumption of meat is lawful (**dharmic**) when proceeding from such animals, birds and fishes as feed on vegetable matter, that is, grasses, seeds, nuts, berries, fruit, leaves and roots. Among these are the buffalo, the goat, the sheep, the deer, the wild boar and the hare; the peacock, the jungle-fowl, the woodpigeon and the partridge.

The same applies to aquatic animals such as fish etc. To begin with, some fish are poisonous therefore only those should be eaten as are known locally to be edible. Apart from this, the consumption of fish that live on vegetable matter, plankton, etc., is lawful. Fish that live on small creatures like worms, insects and small fish, are strictly speaking unlawful but may be consumed in moderation. By contrast, fish that live on larger fish and other large creatures and are particularly aggressive in their feeding habits (shark, killer whale, etc.) is unlawful and must be avoided.

To lawful meat we may add such animals and birds like pigs, chickens, geese and ducks as are kept in an enclosed space where they can be reared on appropriate, pure food (as opposed to animals that can freely rummage through refuse dumps, etc., that is, animals that are not kept for human consumption but, especially in villages, for the purpose of clearing food rests and other such refuse that may be found in the vicinity of houses).

In this context, we may observe that certain religions reject the consumption of pork, for example, on the ground that pigs feed on unclean substances. However, it is quite possible to raise pigs on clean food which should remove any objection. By contrast, the followers of the said religions do not object to the

consumption of other types of meat such as poultry and beef that often comes from animals that are diseased or fed on animal carcasses, chemicals and other objectionable materials. Their position, therefore, must be regarded as logically untenable. Yogic dietary principles, on the other hand, are much more reasonable and coherent. Indeed, the comparative study of the World's different traditions can lead to only one possible, logically sound conclusion, namely, that they were adopted from an earlier, Yogic original and handed down in a poorly understood and distorted form.

Regarding meat consumption, we must be clear about one thing. Man occupies a special position among other beings inhabiting Planet Earth. His role is not to exploit and live off other creatures but to help them fulfil their own evolutionary destiny. For example, animals may be used for transport and agricultural work but not for medical experiments. Furthermore, human consumption of meat must not be carried out on such a scale as to deplete, exterminate or otherwise endanger animal species.

For this reason, the Holy Scriptures of India clearly state that it is not right for a man to increase his own body by taking that of another creature. The slaying of cows, in particular, is regarded as a sin equal to adultery, slavery, forsaking one's guru, parents or children, not studying the Scriptures and neglecting the sacred fire. The penance prescribed for such a sin is fasting and looking after cows for three months and making donations to senior religious leaders (Manu Smriti XI, 60, 109-117).

At the same time, however, the same Scriptures expressly permit the taking of animal life as and when demanded by circumstances. Thus meat eaten for health reasons or when no other food is available, is permitted.

Is Animal Sacrifice permitted?

Sacrifice performed for improper reasons or in an improper manner as well as the meat derived from it is detrimental, dangerous and evil. By contrast, meat derived from proper sacrifice is permitted and belongs to lawful food as explained above.

When correctly performed, the sacrifice of a living being is lawful for the following reasons. It is done in accordance with Holy Scripture. It is done upon receiving Divine Command (in a dream, vision, etc.) or upon enquiry into Divine Will (by means of a qualified priest, shaman, or some other such Spiritual medium) hence it is in harmony with Divine Law. The suffering of the sacrificed creature is minimal. The Soul of the sacrificed is elevated to higher levels of existence by the power of the sacrifice. The manner of death is very important. An animal that passes to another existence as a result of being offered in sacrifice will have a better death and enjoy a better future life than one eaten alive by a snake or torn to pieces by wolves and wild dogs. The sacrificer also gains real benefits, materially and Spiritually speaking.

Therefore, the consumption of meat derived from animals offered in sacrifice to the Gods is permitted. In fact, like all food, meat must not be eaten without offering it up to God first, in recognition of His status of Lord of all creatures (Pashu Pati). In addition to this, a brief prayer for the animal's Soul must also be offered, and the resolve must be made that the strength or any other benefit derived from the meat be used in the cause of Righteousness and not squandered for selfish motives.

What has been said so far in respect of meat will also answer the objection that arises in the context of diet, namely, that not everybody can follow a strict Yogic or vegetarian diet. What are such people supposed to do? Indeed, decades of economic mismanagement by communist-inspired, left-wing governments have left millions in India and elsewhere with very little choice in nutritional matters. It would be both unreasonable and morally wrong, therefore, to expect everybody to follow Yogic dietary rules in all circumstances. It would be wrong, for example, to expect a man, woman or child to starve to death in order to spare an animal's life. Even the Dalai Lama, who is Spiritual Leader to millions of Tibetan Buddhists is not a strict vegetarian. Lord Buddha himself is known to have taken meat when it was offered to him. In consequence, we cannot be too strict on ordinary men. This is the Yogic position from a moral point of view.

Let us now suppose that the consumed meat came from an animal that died of causes other than purposeful slaughter. The issue of taking life, therefore, does not arise. We have already established that in terms of health, vegetarian food is superior to a meat-based diet. But how are we to view the consumption of meat in terms of Spiritual or religious purity? What is essential to understand, is that although a pure, Spiritual diet has its own merits, a person's thoughts, words and deeds are far more important and relevant to his Spiritual welfare in both the present and future life. In this respect, Yoga agrees with all other faiths. Thus the Sages of Ancient Greece taught that "all things are pure to the pure ones". The Bible equally says: "All things indeed are pure" and "there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him that considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean".

The reason why that should be so, is because all things come from God Who is, by definition, Good (Shiva). From the perspective of Yoga, which is the Way of Unity with the Supreme, everything is a creation of God's Infinite Consciousness. Man himself is essentially identical with That. In the Tantraloka, Mahamaheshvara Abhinava Gupta explains: "The right outlook is this, that everything which is (perceived as being) separate from Consciousness is impure and everything on the other hand that is identical with the same, is pure"... "Purity is but the awareness of an object's identity with Shiva (the Universal Consciousness). In a true Yogi this awareness persists with regard to all things"... "He whose mind is firmly established in Reality, even if he were to eat poison, he would not be affected in the least, even as the lotus leaf remains unaffected by water" (IV, 240-1 a; 218-228 a).

However, until we have by means of Yoga reached a state of Divine Awareness (Shiva Samadhi), what we eat may well affect our body, our mind, our life and our environment. Says Scripture: "This (what was said above) was also the view of the Sages of old whose mind was free from all differentiating thoughts. This truth however was kept secret by them so as not to disturb the natural order of the World" (Tantraloka IV, 243 b-244 a).

In consequence, this Higher Truth, namely, that everything is made of Consciousness and hence pure, applies to Enlightened or Advanced Yogis only, and not to ordinary men who remain unaware and unaffected by it. Indeed, even Enlightened Yogis refrain from consuming impure or unlawful food in order to discourage immoral practices and set a good example for the rest of the Community. **As for the unenlightened, they must, for their own good, continue to abide by the dietary rules described above.**

Similarly, we may observe that various methods of deriving nourishment from natural energy-sources such as air and sunlight are well-known to the Yogis of India, many of whom inhabit remote and inhospitable places where ordinary food is unavailable. Such methods are, however, beyond the reach of common men for which reason they must be left out of the present discussion.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 16

DHARMACHARYA (RIGHT CONDUCT)

Part One

QUESTION: What is Dharmacharya?

ANSWER: The Sanskrit word **Dharma** has many interrelated meanings that cannot be expressed by a single English word.

Depending on the context, **Dharma** may signify:

- (1) **World-Supporting Order**, Divine Revelation Universal Law, Justice, Righteousness, Virtue.
- (2) Any action performed in obedience to this, that is, **Spiritual Practice**, Spiritual Belief, Religious Observance, Holy Duty, etc.
- (3) The **Spiritual Merit** obtained by adhering to the above.

A life lived according to **Dharma** is called **Dharmacharya** from Dharma (Righteousness) and Charya (Conduct), and is also known as Shivacharya, Brahmacharya or Sadacharya (Sat-acharya). It must not be confused with Dharma-Aachaarya which means Teacher of Dharma. A strict follower of Dharma is known as **Dharmacharin**.

Although **Dharmacharya** may apply equally to all Spiritually-motivated actions performed by man, it is often used to denote "**Proper Conduct (Sat Aachaara)**", that is to say conduct according to **Universal Law (Dharma)**. Eating proper food, being kind and compassionate towards all living creatures, refraining from unjustified violent acts, etc., would qualify as **Dharmacharya**.

More specifically, **Dharmacharya** means proper conduct in respect of sexual relations. Generally speaking, actions of a sexual nature are either performed or abstained from. **Dharmacharya** covers both situations. Celibacy or abstention from sexual activities is regarded as proper conduct (dharmacharya) in the case of monks who have taken a Vow of Renunciation of worldly life (Sannyas) and are therefore expected to honour that vow. Lay people, on the other hand, are permitted and even expected to enter into relationships that include natural activities such as sexual intercourse, within certain rules.

In Yoga, rules are not designed to make our life difficult, but on the contrary, they are specifically used to make life easier, less complicated and more peaceful. It is a universally recognised fact that the observance of certain rules of conduct is essential to prevent a breakdown in social and moral order. If Humanity were to abandon reason and act exclusively on emotional impulse, for example, the World would soon sink into anarchy and chaos. Moreover, wilful, uncontrolled behaviour would have detrimental results for Mankind's physical, mental and Spiritual well-being.

Even animals have certain rules of behaviour which uphold order within a group or population and which have emerged over the millennia as vital for the well-being and survival of a species. Spiritual life itself is impossible without self-control. In common with other faiths, therefore, Yoga teaches that man must control his emotional and biological urges in the interest of a higher good.

Apart from celibacy which we have already described above, we shall consider some general rules concerning the following main points: menstrual periods, holy days, age of consent, extra-marital relations, same-sex relationships, relations between people of different faiths, sexual practices, abortion and adoption.

Menstrual periods

There is an established link between the phases of the Moon and women's menstrual cycle. In traditional societies leading a life close to Nature, menstruation tends to occur on Full Moon, whereas about a fortnight later, on New Moon, the female reproductive system is the most fertile. Biologically speaking, a woman's monthly courses are a time at which the female body must rest in order to adapt to inner changes, for which reason, sexual intercourse at this time, although not a crime or sin, is not recommended. The sixteenth day from the beginning of the menstruation, on the other hand, is considered the best time for conjugal union and conception.

Holy days

The Indian calendar is based on the phases of the Moon. Among these, the main ones are New Moon, First Quarter, Full Moon and Last Quarter which occur at approximately seven-days intervals. In consequence, every month has **four holy days** counting from the day after New Moon: **the 8th (or First Quarter), the**

15th (Full Moon), the 23rd (Last Quarter) and the 30th (New Moon). They are comparable with the Sundays in the Western calendar and are the most frequently observed holy days in Yoga, New-Moon (or Moonless) Day being the most important. As with other monthly and annual holy days, such as **Shiva Ratri**, they are intended to be occasions on which man takes a break from everyday, material activities and engages in Spiritual observances like prayer and meditation. Meditation on Lord Shiva and His Divine Message to Mankind is particularly meritorious on these days.

In consequence, sexual activities are prohibited on these occasions. Married couples who wish to have children, therefore, are advised to engage in conjugal union on the day after New Moon which is the first day (Pratipada) of the month. This day is particularly auspicious and suitable for conceiving when it coincides with the sixteenth day from the beginning of the menstrual cycle. The observance of this practice is said to promote the Spiritual growth of a couple and ensure the conception of Spiritually-minded children. A child born to parents who are practising Yogis is known as Yogini-bhu or Yogi-born. When observed over several generations, the above mentioned practice results in the birth of a Great Soul (Mahatma or Maha Purusha) or Great Yogi (Maha Yogi).

Age of consent

The Ancient Gospels of India (Puranas) predict that in the current World Age children will be born to girls as young as twelve. This shows that already in those times, underage sexual relations were identified as a symptom of the moral and Spiritual decline of the human race. Indeed, in classical times, countries like India and Rome regarded twelve as the age when a minor legally reached adulthood.

This practice was not due to ignorance but was established for a number of legitimate reasons which must be properly understood in their historical context: (1) The fact is that at about that age, the human body is close to puberty or sexual maturity and therefore capable of reproduction. Marrying a young girl ensured that the bride was not pregnant by anyone other than her lawful husband, thus avoiding possible disputes. (2) Parents could often ill-afford to support daughters who would eventually marry and leave the parental household anyway. (3) Daughters (as opposed to arms-bearing sons) would make it more difficult for a family or village to defend itself. (4) Diseases and malnutrition frequently resulted in a high mortality rate among small children, while at the same time, armed conflicts put a heavy toll on the adult population. Having children at an early age was often the only means of ensuring the survival of the entire community or nation.

However, although the human body may, biologically speaking, be capable of reproduction at as early an age as twelve or even earlier, the fact is that mental and physical maturity is not reached until the age of sixteen. Moreover, there is more to life than having sex and bringing children into the World. The Spiritual teachings that provide the guiding principles for correct and successful adult life only begin to be fully assimilated at sixteen. It is imperative to first understand what life is all about before we do things that can affect the rest of our life.

Therefore, in most traditional societies, sexual relations before the age of sixteen are prohibited. Just as the Moon grows for fifteen days and then is round and full, says Scripture, so also, a human being attains adulthood in his sixteenth year. This is also the age of consent recognised by Yoga as lawful in normal circumstances. However, it is not always possible to prevent minors from being sexually active. Exceptions to the general rule may therefore be allowed when the intentions of the involved persons are genuine and in the best interest of all those concerned. For example, if a minor who is just under the age limit happened to become pregnant and desired to marry the child's father, then permission may be given without breaking the law.

NOTE: What is important to understand at all events is that in Yogic Law (Yoga Dharma) young people **may** marry at the age of sixteen if they so wish. It does not mean to say that they **must** marry (or have sexual intercourse) at that age. It is perfectly acceptable to wait until the age of say, eighteen, twenty, or

even later, depending on each person's circumstances and taking into consideration the interests of both individual and community (Sangha).

Under-age Marriage

The Indian State has set the age of consent at eighteen. This is an unjustified imitation of Communist Russia and has no basis in traditional Indian Law. Indeed, it is customary in India and other traditional societies for people to marry even under the age of sixteen, in so-called "child marriages". This is more accurately described as "betrothal", that is, children are bound to each other by their parents or relatives with a promise to marry, but they continue to live with their respective parents or family until a later age. This is permitted in Yogic Law, provided that the marriage is not consummated (no sexual intercourse between the betrothed or "married" children takes place) until the age of sixteen.

Arranged Marriage

Arranged Marriage is marriage to a person chosen for one by the parents or relatives. Due to the parents' knowledge of their own child, experience of life, and other relevant factors, arranged marriages are often more successful than the type prevalent in Western societies, where young people are left to choose their own future partner or spouse. Arranged marriage is permitted in Yoga provided that it is not forced.

Extra-marital relations

To avoid emotional and material conflict and suffering, marital commitment must be promoted and extra-marital relationships avoided. The Ancient Gospels of India (Puranas) state that, "Harmony between husband and wife is conducive to the attainment of the first three Goals of life (Righteousness, Love and Prosperity)" (Skanda P. IV. i. 36: 82). The final Goal, Nirvana, is attainable through Yoga. As the Spirituality of Unity, Yoga naturally supports unity and loyalty between husband and wife.

Disloyalty does sometimes occur, however. In such regrettable cases, the Scriptures prescribe that the husband or wife who is unfaithful to the other must atone for his or her transgression by fasting for three days, giving the spouse gifts of livestock, jewellery or other valuables, and vowing not to transgress again. If the vow is broken once, the fast and the amount of gifts is to be doubled. If the vow be broken twice, the bond of marriage shall be regarded as severed and the couple shall either marry again after one year or go separate ways. But it is better for them to make up and stay faithful to each other. Even better, of course, if they could refrain from transgressing in the first place. Such ones would be true followers of Unity and an example to all.

Same-sex relations

It is a universally accepted fact that the survival of the human race is a good thing. But if all or most humans were homosexual, the human race would soon become extinct. Since human reproduction is necessary for the survival of the species and heterosexual (man-woman) intercourse is necessary for human reproduction, it must be in the interest of humanity for all or most of its members to be heterosexual. This is precisely the reason why, although homosexuality has been part of human variation for millennia, it has remained a small percentage throughout history.

It is sometimes claimed that homosexuality was accepted as normal behaviour in ancient Greece. First of all, we do not accept all Ancient Greek customs. We do not have to accept all their sexual habits either. Secondly, even in Ancient Greece homosexual practices were subject to certain laws and regulations. Moreover, there is no evidence that homosexuality was observed by the entire population, especially among the rural classes. Had this been the case, the Greek nation would have died out long ago! Nor were Greek Gods and Heroes usually portrayed as homosexual.

The truth of the matter is that, as in other countries from Ancient Rome to Modern Britain, such practices were mainly observed by the upper classes who have always exhibited a peculiar inclination to be different from the others. Among the military, homosexual relations were tolerated for practical reasons, as a temporary measure to release sexual tension. On termination of military service, however, all men were expected as a matter of social duty to have a family and children.

Nor is there any evidence to support the claim that homosexuality makes a nation more prosperous and successful. Despite its sexual sophistication, Greek Civilisation was eventually defeated by Rome, Christianity and Islam, three cultures that, in common with the majority of Mankind, have chosen heterosexuality as the preferred form of interaction between humans.

We may also observe that although homosexuality is quite prominent in large Western cities, it is virtually unknown among the native tribes of Africa, America, Asia and Australia. This would suggest that the rise in such practices is not natural but cultural. The natural situation is one where homosexual practices are an exception to the general rule. On the whole, therefore, it seems unwise, on spurious ideological or political grounds to seek to reverse this time-honoured balance in favour of homosexuality.

In addition to this, there are other considerations of a moral, religious, Spiritual and legal order, that need to be taken into account. Most religious traditions view homosexuality as an aberrant form of behaviour that sometimes amounts to criminal offence punishable by death. The Hindu Law of Manu (VIII, 369), Arthashastra (IV, 13: 40), Dharmasutra (Baudh., III, 7: 2), the Jewish-Christian Bible (Lev. 18: 22; Romans 1: 27-32) and the Muslim Quran (4: 15) are very clear on this matter. Nor is it difficult to see why. There is no logical or scientific reason why homosexuality should be the only permissible deviation from the usual norm. It would be legally and morally wrong to promote one deviation while suppressing others.

If sexual relations between two men or two women were acceptable, then they should also be acceptable between brother and sister, father and daughter, mother and son, humans and animals, etc. This would lead to a complete breakdown in the social order upon which a stable and successful society stands. It would also lead to a breakdown in scriptural authority upon which the majority of mankind base their life. Therefore, so long as this important issue has not been clarified, the homosexual cause will continue to be denied the level of credibility it seeks to establish for itself.

From the perspective of Yoga, homosexual inclinations are habits acquired in this or a previous life through lack of adequate Spiritual guidance. Since such habits often take a lifetime to change, Yoga tolerates same-sex relations *as an exception* while emphasising the fact that heterosexual (male-female) relationships must remain the general rule in accordance with Universal Law (**Dharma**). There is enough division and conflict in the World as it is. The last thing Mankind needs is a split between men and women. As the Spirituality of Universal Unity, Yoga cannot accept the division and separation of men and women advocated by the agents of disunity. Tolerance is one thing, allowing the forces of disunity to take over is quite another.

Let us briefly analyse the issue from a Spiritual and psychological point of view. There are three factors that need to be considered in order to adequately assess the meaning and value of a particular action: 1) the agent's motives, 2) the effects of the action upon the agent and 3) the effects of the action upon the surrounding World (environment, society, etc.).

While feelings of affection towards persons of the same sex as oneself are natural, they do not have to lead to sexual interaction. The fact is that, from a Spiritual view, emotional and intellectual love is higher than physical love and Spiritual love is higher still. Moreover, Spiritual love (the sense of unity between two Souls) need not express itself as emotional love (desire), nor does emotional love need to express itself as physical (or sexual) action. If man can control feelings of anger, envy and greed, then he can also control feelings of attraction. A married man, for example, is quite capable, even expected to control any feelings of attraction he may develop for any woman other than his wife. And what is expected of a heterosexual man, may also be reasonably expected of a homosexually-inclined person.

Scientific studies have established that while genetic inheritance may contribute to the development of homosexual predispositions, a person's sexual orientation is ultimately determined by other factors such as education and sexual experience.

Even if we were to suppose, for argument's sake, that homosexuality is determined by inborn genetic factors (as claimed by some scientists), it would make no difference to the general principles of free will and personal responsibility which cannot be abrogated on the grounds of an individual's genetic makeup. Genetically-induced inclinations cannot cause a person to act in certain ways unless he consciously chooses to give in to them. Otherwise, no man could ever be held accountable for his own actions.

Another objection to homosexual practices is that man and woman were created to complement each other and unity between them is regarded as having psychological and Spiritual dimensions that constitute an essential factor in their Spiritual evolution and growth in the same way as on the physical level sexual intercourse between man and woman is conducive to reproduction and the growth of the Community.

By contrast, homosexual acts being incapable of fulfilling a reproductive function, cannot contribute to the Community's growth. Nor can they always be said to represent a straightforward expression of genuine love, but may in some cases be symptomatic of an individual's inability to adequately relate to others, in particular to persons of the opposite sex, which inability may moreover be the result of inadequate upbringing.

Finally, if an emotional impulse such as sexual desire is at any time allowed to express itself physically, then this should happen in agreement with the good of the entire Community (upon which the individual himself ultimately depends) and not merely for personal reasons. Thus the larger order of things must in all circumstances be taken as a frame of reference for one's own actions and a course of action should be taken only upon due consideration of the above stated principles.

At all events, Yogis have the duty to be an example to all Mankind - including in matters of a sexual nature - in particular when a Yogi occupies a leading position in the Community. Since, as already intimated, Yoga regards homoerotic tendencies as acquired psychological habits, they are naturally expected to be absent in a Spiritual Master who always acts in obedience to Spiritual Law (**Dharma**).

Interdenominational relations

Sexual relations with members of other religious denominations is prohibited to all true Yogis in order to protect the Community against contamination by beliefs and practices that are contrary to Yoga and Universal Law. Indeed, as the Teachings of Yoga are the Original Revelation of Truth on Earth, a dilution and possible loss thereof would result in grave consequences not only for the Spiritual Community of Yogis but for the whole of the human race which will remain bereft of true Spiritual Guidance. However, exception is made when a devotee's prospective spouse agrees to accept the teachings of Yoga, by pronouncing the words, "**Lord Shiva (the Supreme Principle of Goodness) is the Highest God, and Yoga is the Path that leads to Him**". This is only natural as marital harmony and happiness are to not insignificant an extent dependent upon the future partners sharing the same religious views. See also **Choosing the right Soul mate**, below.

Types of Marriage

Nine kinds of marriage are mentioned in Yogic Scriptures: three lawful and six unlawful. The lawful ones are the following three. (1) Firstly, that wherein a daughter, having been decked with costly garments, jewellery and gifts is given by her father unto a virtuous man of his own choice, but never to one of evil character, nor to one who is not a follower of Yogic Law (Yoga Dharma). (2) Secondly, that wherein the bridegroom, having chosen a bride, of his own will gives as much wealth to her parents, her kinsfolk and to herself as he can afford. "Of his own will", means to say, without being solicited by the bride's parents or

family which would amount to the bride being sold. The dowry is usually property such as jewellery, clothes and household objects which the bride brings to the husband as in the first type of marriage indicated above. In this second type, property (or money) is given by the bridegroom to the bride's parents or legal custodians (kinsfolk), or to herself upon failure of the former. (3) Thirdly, that wherein a maiden and her sweetheart meet in secret out of mutual desire, in which case they shall reveal their intention to the girl's parents, the village elders or the King within a year.

These three shall be known as lawful to all followers of the Yoga Path. But amongst these three, that union which springs from love is said to be the most pleasing to both men and God.

Of the forbidden kinds, the first three are those done by (1) stealth, (2) deception or (3) force. They who take or give a person in marriage by any of these three means, are committing a great sin for which they shall be severely punished by the King. Although arranged marriage is common in India and Indian communities round the World, it must not be confused with forced marriage. Arranged marriage is when a prospective partner is procured with the help of parents, family or friends and is unanimously accepted by the couple. By contrast, forced marriage is when a person is forced, under physical or verbal threat, to marry. This latter form of marriage is, of course, illegal in Yoga.

Other forbidden forms of marriage are the following: (4) That in which a bride is given to a man after being promised to another. (5) That in which a bride or bridegroom is substituted with another (after being shown to the suitor). (6) That in which a follower of Dharma weds one who follows laws other than those established by Lord Shiva.

He who intends to marry an unbeliever (one who doesn't believe in Yoga) should consider that love for the whole of Mankind is greater than love for a single man and that Love of Shiva's Truth is the greatest of all. Thinking thus, he shall be preserved from temptation and shall not commit a sin. But if the would-be spouse embrace the Law of Shiva (Shiva Dharma), the two may marry and live together in peace.

The Wedding Ceremony

Different Wedding Ceremonies are observed by different cultures in the World. In India itself, such customs may vary among different ethnic and religious groups. On the whole, however, certain elements in a wedding-rite may be established as agreeing with Yogic Law (Yoga Dharma).

Firstly, the bride and the groom are regarded as manifestations of the Divine Male and Female Principles, called Shiva and Shakti. Secondly, a fire may be kindled and some incense, clarified butter or some other such substance cast into it. Thirdly, the Grace of the Supreme Lord may be invoked with a brief prayer: O Lord of Immeasurable Glory! from Delusion lead us unto Truth; from Darkness lead us unto Light; from Death lead us unto Eternal Life.

Fourthly, pledging allegiance to each other and swearing to abide in unity as one, is the final and most important step. This may be done either verbally or by some symbolic gesture such as tying the ends of their garments together. The groom may then take the bride's hand and step three times round the fire clockwise (or according to the course of the Sun that is, from East to South and so forth).

The three ceremonial steps symbolise the hope that the couple will remain together through birth, life and death. Some, however, prefer to take seven steps round the fire or walk seven steps towards the North, which is symbolic of the couple's desire to together ascend the seven steps to Heaven that is, to go beyond the six levels of existence that culminate in the seventh and highest state of Union with the Divine. With that, the holy wedding-rite is accomplished and the couple is accounted husband and wife.

Although there is no legal requirement for other persons to be present, a priest or priests, parents and guests are usually present at a wedding. They are considered to be earthly witnesses. The sacred fire is the witness

divine. For God Himself resides in all things that shine. Says the Shiva Purana: "Fire is Mahadeva (Lord Shiva) and Svaha is His Consort (Shivaa)". Hence the fire is a token of God's Supreme Light. If no fire is obtainable, then a lamp may be kindled or even some incense will suffice. If that too be not at hand, then the wedding may take place by a tree, a lake or a running stream and the union be witnessed by the Sun, the Moon or the North Star.

It will be remembered that God is All-Seeing and All-Wise and He resides in all things that shine. Says Scripture: "The Sun is Lord Shiva and his light is His Consort. The Moon is Shiva, and the Star Rohini is His Beloved", etc. Indeed, Indian religion associates all three luminaries (Sun, Moon and North Star) with auspiciousness and good fortune. Thus the Sun is said to be married to Samjna ("Clarity", "Mutual Understanding", "Harmony"), and the Moon God's devotion for his favourite wife, the Constellation Rohini ("the Red one", so called after the main star in Taurus) is legendary. Similarly, the North or Pole Star, called "Dhruva" or "Immovable" in Sanskrit, symbolises marital devotion and steadfastness and is associated with the Star Arundhati ("Faithfulness", in the Constellation Great Bear). Gazing upon any of these is a magic and religious act which draws heavenly blessing to the bride and groom.

Temporary Marriage

Apart from the types of marriage described above, marriage may be either lifelong or temporary. The wedding ceremony is identical in both cases, the main difference being that an abbreviated form thereof may suffice in the temporary one. Although temporary marriage may be dissolved any time, it is imperative to ensure that the wife is not pregnant. For example, "The wife married for the purpose of Chakra-Puja (a Tantric ceremony) should be released only after the appearance of her menses", says the Mahanirvana Tantra.

Married Life

Man and woman were made for the establishment of Divine Law (Dharma) on Earth and for the good of each other. They are the earthly likeness of the First Beings Divine and the twofold Manifestation of the One. Therefore, they shall know each other to be Divine, honour each other, elevate each other and work together for the welfare of all. Moreover, when the Male (Sun) and Female (Moon) Principles unite, then the excellent fruit of Unity (a Spiritual child) is conceived whereby the Light of Spirit spreads forth into the World.

God created man for woman and woman for man. A married couple is not two but one. The purpose of marriage is to make what was separated into one. Those who are joined in the marriage of Shiva are one Spirit, even as God Himself is One. Therefore they shall keep that unity of Spirit and not fall into the Abode of Discord. Harmony and friendship must prevail in a married couple. The couple that is happy, healthy and virtuous will have offspring endowed with the same qualities. Likewise, they that are unhappy, devoid of good health and given to sin will bear offspring like themselves. Says Scripture: "Righteous and pious children living up to a hundred years are born of righteous marriages. Unfortunate, poor and short-lived children are born of unrighteous wedlock" (Skanda Purana IV. i. 36:8).

In consequence, man and woman shall ever avoid unrighteous deeds. They shall ever strive to do works that are agreeable and beneficial to each other and to the Community of the Righteous (Dharma Sangham), that Divine Law (Shiva Dharma) may prevail on Earth.

Choosing the right Soul Mate

As stated in the section on **Interdenominational relations**, above, it is illegal in Yogic Law for a follower of Dharma to wed one who follows other laws. This is to protect the Community against contamination by beliefs and practices that are contrary to Yoga. The Shiva Purana declares: "A maiden who is a follower of Shiva shall not be given in marriage to one who is not a devotee. If the husband be not a devotee she shall

endeavour to guide him unto the Path of Shiva. But if unable to do so, let her abandon him and (upon failure to obtain another husband) turn her mind to a holy life" (Vayaviya Samhita II, 15:66).

A follower of Shiva should request the prospective spouse to embrace the Path of Yoga by pronouncing the words "Lord Shiva (the Supreme Principle of Goodness) is the Highest God and Yoga is the Path that leads to Him". Should the husband or wife refuse to do so or, having accepted the Path of Yoga decide to abandon it, the marriage becomes legally invalid. In consequence, Spiritual or religious compatibility is one of the main considerations in finding the right partner.

Secondly, a prospective partner must be endowed with certain marks that are traditionally regarded as auspicious. Yoga knows various systems of determining a person's character, health or future course of life by the study of physical features and behaviour. These characteristics are usually classified as eight: (1) Vapus (limbs), (2) Avarta (curls), (3) Gandha (odour), (4) Chaya (aura as well as shadow or reflection), (5) Sattva (mental stability), (6) Svava (voice), (7) Gati (gait), and (8) Varna (complexion).

Marital Unity

A question that often arises in the context of marital life is: Which of the two shall have authority over the other, the husband or the wife? It is well to observe here that the point at issue is not which gender should rule over the other in general, but who should assume a position of authority in a marital relation.

It must be stated from the outset that Yoga treats both men and women as equal. However, the fact is that every Soul has a particular role to play in the Universal Plan. If all of a country's citizens competed with each other for leadership, this would result in disunity and conflict. Similarly, competition within a household leads to conflict, disunity and isolation.

By contrast, co-operation leads to harmony, unity and togetherness. Since not all Souls can fulfil the same function, men and women are expected to occupy different positions or roles in society which correspond to their respective natural aptitudes. For example, the natural role of woman is that of bearing and raising children and that of man to provide for and protect both woman and child. The two are equally relevant and deserving of equal recognition. Submitting to the authority of the husband in times of war, for example, does in no way diminish a woman's position in society, nor is a man's dignity lowered by following the wife's advice on certain domestic issues. As always in Yoga, the essential point is unity, harmony and co-operation as opposed to the ego-centred competition promoted by modern, materialistic societies.

Unity is of three kinds, of body, of mind and of Soul: **Body Unity** consisting of physical contact between two bodies is universally admitted to represent a pleasurable experience. It takes place, for example, when two animals mate or in any other instance where contact is purely physical and does not involve emotions.

Emotional or Mental Unity, between two minds, is much more beautiful. It is experienced when two like-minded persons exchange thoughts and feelings either in verbal or physical communication such as when making love.

Spiritual Unity, between one Soul and another, on the other hand, is the most beautiful, most fulfilling and most vitally important. However, in materialistic societies people are not consciously aware of this fact. The need for Spiritual unity is only subconsciously felt by most people. As a result of this and because most people are unaware of themselves as Souls, physical unity is often used as a substitute for mental or emotional unity and these both are used as a substitute for Spiritual unity.

Human beings may therefore be divided into three distinct categories according to their capacity for experiencing unity: (1) **Animal-like**, comprising those persons who experience unity mostly or exclusively on the physical level, (2) **Human**, being those who experience unity on the mental or emotional level and

(3) **Divine**, comprising all living beings who are capable of experiencing unity with other Souls directly and without the intermediary of body and mind.

Yoga Practice (Sadhana) requires that whenever we relate to another being we ask ourselves: "On what level am I making Unity (with the other person) at this very moment?" Having found an answer we must then endeavour to establish Unity with the other Soul or Souls at the highest possible level and then allow that Unity to express itself on any of the other, lower levels when and as circumstances require. In this way we constantly elevate ourselves to higher and higher stages of experience until we finally reach the state of **Universal Unity (Shiva Samadhi)**.

In consequence, man and woman shall ever abide as one. **From Unity spring all things that are right and good but from Discord comes only what is evil and wrong.** Says Scripture: "Harmony between husband and wife is conducive to the attainment of the first three Goals of life (Righteousness, Love, Prosperity)" (Skanda Purana IV. i. 36:82). The final Goal, **Nirvana**, is attainable through Yoga (Unity with the Supreme).

Since the family constitutes the basic unit of human society, marital harmony is of utmost importance for a happy and healthy population. Various festivals celebrating marital unity and prosperity are held all over India, in particular Teej (Tritiya Tithi, on the third day of the month of Bhadrapada).

What if a Soul Mate is not found?

God is Compassionate and Just. He ensures that every man and woman will eventually find a Soul mate. However, due to certain Karmic factors, this does not always happen at once. In some cases it may take years or even lifetimes to find one's true Soul mate. Until such time, a person may enter into relationships with other Souls who are temporary companions. Those who are unable or unwilling to find such companions, may devote their life to Spiritual Practice and work to spread Shiva's Word of Truth. Such persons are in no way inferior to householders and will be well-rewarded for their Spiritual efforts, both in this life and the next.

Polygamy

It has become fashionable in Western and Western-influenced societies to condemn polygamy as something immoral. Such attitude is a typical example of Western ignorance of other cultures. To eradicate such deplorable prejudices, it is important to understand that in traditional societies, polygamy (a man having more than one wife) and polyandry (a woman having more than one husband) are not practised for the purpose of sexual gratification as is erroneously assumed in the West, but purely for demographic, economic or Spiritual reasons.

In times of war, for example, when a high number of men are killed in battle, a large proportion of the female population is unable to find a partner. Unmarried women therefore will seek to find a partner among already-married men, a situation that necessarily leads to social problems. The obvious solution is for married men, to the extent to which they are able to do so, to take a second or third wife.

Conversely, when the male population outnumbers the female population, it may become necessary for several men (for example, brothers) to share one wife in order to redress the male-female imbalance. This last-named practice though not very widespread, is still common in parts of India, including Tibet and Nepal.

What is important to understand is that Yoga is an inclusive faith that accepts both polygamy (a man having more than one wife) and polyandry (a woman having more than one husband). The charge of discrimination against women must therefore be rejected as completely baseless, especially in view of the fact that, in Yoga, women are revered as incarnations of Goddess Parvati. The Holy Scriptures of

India declare that happy women are a blessing to every household. Images of Goddesses are found in all Indian temples, and many of the heavens which devotees aspire to attain are said to be inhabited by female deities.

The fact is that polygamy has always been more prevalent than polyandry, including in the animal kingdom. From a biological point of view, a male who is physically strong and healthy, intelligent and successful, ought to mate with several females in order to propagate his superior genes, thereby contributing to the advancement of the entire population. Ethically speaking also, it would be in the interest of the whole population for a man of good moral and Spiritual character to have several wives and many children.

By contrast, if men of inferior moral and Spiritual character (such as unreformed criminals) were the main generators of offspring, this would lead to a rapid degeneration of human society, causing materialism, crime and violence to rise and Spirituality to decline. In such a situation, it is the duty of a Spiritually-minded man to redress the imbalance by marrying several women and producing a large number of Spiritually-minded children.

This fact is supported by scientific research which has established that a person's Spiritual inclination (or lack thereof) is largely inherited. In consequence, while accepting monogamous (one-spouse-only) relationships as the ideal situation, Yoga also recognises the necessity of polygamy as a practical means of redressing social imbalance.

From a historical point of view, we may observe that having several wives or female partners is not an exclusively Indian or Eastern practice. On the contrary, it is a custom that was widely observed in the Ancient World, including among the Pharaohs of Egypt, the Kings of Israel, the Kings of Africa, Central America and the rulers of many European nations. Among the latter, we may mention the 13th century German King and Roman Emperor Frederick II, one of the most eminent rulers in European history, who was known to his contemporaries as the "Wonder of the World" (Stupor Mundi).

In Indian Mythology, the Ocean is compared to a great Sovereign while rivers are compared to a Sovereign's wives, so this must have been a familiar concept. Indeed, the practice of polygamy is well attested in the Holy Scriptures of India, in particular among powerful beings, both human and divine, such as Kings, Sages and Gods. For example, the Vishnu Purana relates the story of Sage Saubhari who married fifty princesses. The Shiva Purana states that the Moon God has twenty-seven wives, while Lord Krishna is said to have had as many as 16,108.

The fact is that Indian people cannot be expected to deny their own history and culture merely to appease a few unreasonable and biased Westerners. Moreover, the rising divorce rate in Western societies demonstrates that Westerners are only deluding themselves in imagining that state-imposed monogamy is superior to time-honoured Eastern practices. If anything, forced monogamy is more restrictive than polygamy and is therefore incompatible with the principles of democracy and freedom which Western culture is said to promote.

Sexual Intercourse

Sexual intercourse is the contact of the male and female sexual organs which involves the penetration of the female organ by the male. Of itself it is quite natural, being in harmony with the divinely established Eternal Law of the Universe (Sanatana Dharma). There is nothing wrong or sinful about it. When correctly performed it can be a source of enjoyment and it promotes physical and mental health and happiness.

It is the duty of both husband and wife to assist each other in enjoying a pleasant and fulfilling life. Sexual satisfaction and fulfilment constitute an essential ingredient to a happy marriage. A happy couple will produce happy children and happy children will produce a happy society which is like a reflection of Heaven on Earth.

In Ancient India, the art of making love was given the status of a science in its own right which people could study under the expert guidance of a qualified teacher. Unfortunately, much of this knowledge was lost with the advent of repressive religions from the West. The "Kama Sutra" is one of the few manuals to survive. Due to the complexity of the subject, it is not advisable for the uninitiated to try out the practices described in such works without authorised guidance.

For most purposes, simple positions are the best. Of these, the following are the most common. First, that in which a couple are facing each other, the man lying on top of the woman who reclines on her back with legs apart and feet touching behind him. Second, that in which the man reclines on his back and the woman is seated astride him. Third, that in which the woman's body rests on hands and knees and the man approaches her from behind. For the purpose of conception, the first position is to be regarded as the best.

Oral Sex

Oral sex is that in which a person uses his or her mouth to stimulate the partner's genitals. Although it is permitted, it can cause infections of the genital and urinary organs and therefore must not be indulged in too frequently. The couple must also ensure that none of them suffer from any contagious disease and that their mouth and genitals are thoroughly cleansed or washed prior to such activity.

Anal Sex

Anal sex is that in which the woman's anus or rectum is penetrated by her partner's erect penis. This practice is permitted provided that both the penis and the anus/rectum are well washed. The interior of the rectum in particular must be thoroughly cleansed by inserting the middle finger, lubricated with honey, oil or butter, gently removing any impurities with a circular movement and repeatedly rinsing with water. Like oral sex, anal sex must be practised in moderation. In addition, care must be taken to avoid internal injury.

Masturbation

Masturbation or the manual stimulation of the genitals is permitted when no other means of deriving sexual pleasure is available or during foreplay. Ideally, it should not lead to ejaculation or loss of semen in the male. Indeed, ejaculation must be avoided in all sexual activities except for the purpose of conception. This applies in particular to those who wish to lead a Spiritual life. As far as monks (sannyasis) are concerned they must, of course, abstain from all sexual activity, mental or physical.

Sexual energy (virya) is a great power. When suppressed or wrongly used it leads to imbalance and illness. On the other hand, when properly employed it can help man accomplish great deeds. Being a God-given gift, it ought to be carefully preserved and transmuted into higher forms of energy through meditation, physical exercise or military training, depending on each person's capacity, inclination and role in the community. Therefore the **preservation of vital energy (virya-labha)** is one of the key practices of Yoga. He who carefully guards his energy becomes a **Great Hero (Maha Vira)** and equal to the Gods.

Prostitution

Prostitution, or the performance of sexual activity with another person for payment, is permitted provided that:

1. It is voluntary and not forced
2. It is conducted in ways that do not lead to the erosion of cultural, social and moral values
3. It does not induce the persons involved to neglect their social and religious duties. All other forms of prostitution are strictly forbidden.

The fact is that even the most repressive regimes on Earth have failed to completely eradicate prostitution. Forcing prostitutes to operate secretly is not only dishonest but encourages hypocrisy and criminal behaviour. For example, the Christian Church, officially a staunch "defender of moral values" has historically proved one of the World's largest promoters of prostitution and child abuse.

Catholic priests, in particular, despite their official commitment to celibacy, have for centuries indulged in such practices. While in the past Church authority ensured that improper sexual conduct remained unreported, today the Church has to pay hundreds of millions of dollars in compensation to victims of sexual abuse committed by priests. Similarly, in the Islamic World, the former Islamic Taleban regime of Afghanistan while officially condemning prostitution, allowed its members to satisfy their sexual urges through forced marriage, rape and the sexual abuse of (in particular male) children, etc.

Moreover, as sexual acts between consenting adults are natural and therefore permitted, voluntary prostitution must also be permitted. Otherwise, a woman who marries a man for financial gain or offers certain sexual favours to her husband in exchange for cash or other gifts, for example, ought to be deemed a prostitute and convicted of a criminal offence, which is absurd. In consequence, the only logically tenable position is that prostitution must be permitted, subject to certain regulations as described above.

The study of human sexual behaviour demonstrates that in societies where sexual relations are less restricted, it is relatively easy for every person to find a sexual partner, rendering prostitution unnecessary. By contrast, societies where the practice of marriage (in particular, monogamy) is imposed on the population for religious or political reasons, tend to become fertile ground for the proliferation of prostitution. If prostitution is, at least in part, a natural reaction to the institution of marriage, then it is wrong, morally and logically speaking, to prohibit it.

Indeed, our ancestors were wise enough to regard prostitution as natural in and of itself. Moreover, historical evidence suggests that, in Ancient Greece and the Middle East, that is, the very cradle of Western Civilisation, prostitution was the domain of temple priestesses who performed sexual acts as a matter of religious duty.

In India herself, prostitution has similarly been associated with religious practices as evidenced by the institution of the **devadasis** (servants of God or temple-maidens). The term "devadasi" is found in ancient texts like the Rajatarangini and Arthashastra. The devadasis were young girls who were regarded as married to the Deity worshipped in a temple and devoted their lives to dancing and singing in his honour. They are known to have engaged in ritual intercourse with the officiating priest (the human representative of the Deity) as well as with lay worshippers in exchange for monetary contributions or donations to the temple.

The devadasi system was largely hereditary, mothers dedicating their first-born daughters as devadasis who in turn would dedicate their own daughters. However, pious parents would also dedicate their daughters to temple-service as a religious duty and to acquire merit. Large temples such as the famous Somanatha Temple were served by as many as 350 temple-maidens, a figure with astronomical and calendrical connotations.

As the eminent historian of religion, Professor Mircea Eliade, has observed, "We must bear in mind that, from prehistoric times, India has known countless rites implying sexuality, and in the most various cultural contexts". It is beyond dispute that sexual intercourse as a religious and magical practice is documented in the Holy Scriptures of India such as Atharva Veda, Brihad-Aranyaka Upanishad and others. In particular, sexual union with a "public woman", whether we call her "pumshchali", "veshya", "dombi", "chandali", "yogini", "duti", "nautch-girl", "courtesan" or "devadasi" is recommended in many ancient Tantric texts as one of the ways to attain Salvation or Union with the Supreme.

From a Spiritual perspective, sexual intercourse represents a state of union between two Souls. As such it not only constitutes an experience that is necessary for man's physical and emotional well-being but, when

correctly understood and practised, can actually lead to a person's Spiritual upliftment. "The woman must not be touched for the sake of bodily pleasure, but for the perfecting of the spirit", says the Anandabhairava, while the Shiva Purana declares that "All men are Shiva (God) and all women are Maheshvari (Goddess)", the implication being that the union of woman and man is a natural and desirable act that leads to a higher and more complete experience of life.

While sexual union with a prostitute will not result in a religious experience in all cases, by infusing it with Spiritual meaning we not only remain faithful to the time-honoured tradition of our exalted ancestors but also contribute to the Spiritual elevation of both client and prostitute and, by extension, of human society as a whole. By contrast, its systematic de-Spiritualisation and dehumanisation can only result in the degeneration of human society and increase its vulnerability to all kinds of evils.

We may observe that it was not the sacralisation and Spiritualisation of prostitution but its secularisation, commercialisation and demonisation by the Western (Muslim and Christian) invaders of India that has brought about the downfall of the great Indian Nation.

India cannot move forwards by imitating the West where a tidal wave of pornography, child abuse, trafficking of women and children for the purpose of forced prostitution, drugs, mental illness and crime is threatening to wipe out the last vestiges of human morality and decency, but by drawing inspiration from her own glorious past.

Contraception or Pregnancy Prevention

Pregnancy is a frequent occurrence resulting from intersexual relations. Although the bringing into the World of new life is usually a cause for celebration, the fact is that pregnancy is sometimes undesirable.

Yoga, therefore, approves of various contraceptive measures for the prevention of pregnancy. The best among these is retention of semen. This, however, requires prolonged practice and a well-developed capacity of self-control which is often absent particularly in young males.

Other, natural measures such as the ingestion of traditional herbal remedies (known to qualified experts) and the use of condoms are also acceptable.

Contraceptive pills and other products that alter the body's hormone production are less natural and must be avoided as far as possible.

Abortion

It is the duty of both partners to avoid unwanted pregnancy. However, it cannot be successfully prevented in all cases. In consequence, the drastic measure of deliberately terminating a pregnancy may sometimes become necessary. Such an action is known as **Abortion**.

As a general rule, Abortion is forbidden under Yogic Law (Yoga Dharma). Exception to this rule can be made on legitimate moral or medical grounds only. Thus Abortion is permitted in the following instances:

1. When the foetus is diagnosed by medical experts to be suffering from conditions that would make it difficult or impossible for the child to lead a normal, fruitful life.
2. When the continuation of the pregnancy would endanger the life of the pregnant woman.

3. When pregnancy occurs as a result of unlawful sexual intercourse such as rape, intercourse with a person who is opposed to Dharma, etc.

If none of the above grounds apply, it is advisable to allow the pregnancy to follow its natural course and seek help in the upbringing of the child from family, relatives, friends and relevant organisations.

Adoption

As a last resort, the child may be given up for adoption. Adoption itself is not an ideal solution, but it must be regarded as preferable to abortion. It is also important to ensure that the adoptive parents do not indulge in beliefs or practices that are contrary to Yoga otherwise one becomes guilty of exposing the child to such beliefs and practices. On their part, adoptive parents must ensure that an adopted child is treated in the same way as if he were their own natural child. Otherwise they would commit a great sin.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 17

THE TRUTH ABOUT CREATION

QUESTION: How was the World created according to Yoga?

ANSWER: One of the most important questions that an intelligent person can ask is, How was the World created or, in different terms, What is the World made from? The reason why this is so important is because it influences the way in which the believer views the World and lives his life.

For example, if we get the wrong impression about a person when we first meet him, it will affect the way we relate to him later on. Similarly, if we get the wrong view about the World from the outset, we can hardly get anything else right in life. This is why there is so much confusion in the World today, in particular when it comes to religious matters.

Indeed, many religious teachings are just man-made inventions that are conducive to irrational thinking and create much suffering in the World. Irrational beliefs lead to irrational actions.

It is our duty, therefore, to expose such errors of belief in order that Mankind may return to the True Faith and Righteousness may be re-established on Earth.

Eastern Wisdom vs. Western Dogma

There are two fundamentally opposed views on the subject of Creation. The older, Eastern Traditions of Yoga, Hinduism and Buddhism say that the World was made out of the Creator Himself. The World therefore consists of the same substance as the Creator (that is, Intelligence or Consciousness). By contrast, the newer, Western Traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam maintain that the World is made out of nothing. How can these two apparently contradictory views be reconciled?

First, we must understand that there is a difference between what people believe and what Scripture says. Second, a further distinction must be made between what Scripture appears to be saying and what it really says on closer examination. In the case of the Eastern view (Creation out of the Creator), the situation is very clear. Eastern Scriptures say that "All this was born of God", "God became all this", "This whole World is pervaded with beings that are part of Him", "He is hidden in all things" "All this is perceived (or projected) by Shiva within Himself", "This World, which is a mass of thought, is thought by Him, and in

Him it disappears" (see Shvet., Maitri Upanishads, Shiva Purana, etc.), and this is also interpreted as such by their followers.

In the case of the Western view (Creation out of Nothing) the situation is rather more obscure. The fact is that neither the Jewish, nor the Christian, nor the Muslim Scriptures actually say that the World was created from nothing.

And yet, in the year 1215, the Christian Church declared Nothing to be the substance out of which God created the World: "We firmly believe and openly confess that there is only one true God, the one principle of the Universe, Creator of all things visible and invisible, spiritual and corporeal, Who from the beginning of time and by His omnipotent power made *from nothing* creatures both spiritual and corporeal, angelic and human" (Fourth Lateran Council, Canon 1).

That this cannot be so, even a child can see. A Spiritual creature such as an Angel, for example, is, by definition, made of Spirit and not of Nothing. To maintain that Spirit can rise out of nothing is to divest it of its true value and meaning. Moreover, since Angels are admitted to be God's own Powers, how can anyone say that they were created from nothing? Such a stance, therefore, is manifestly wrong because it is contrary to Truth and because it creates confusion in the mind of sincere Seekers of Truth.

Strictly speaking, Nothing means no-thing, that is to say, an inconceivable "something" that is non-existent. And if it doesn't exist, then it has no substance, no value, no meaning, and nothing whatsoever can be said about it, let alone create things from it.

If we were to accept - for the sake of argument - that God created the World out of Nothing, this would mean that the Nothing existed prior to the World. If that is so, then the question arises as to whether the Nothing (a) has always existed or (b) was only created prior to the Creation of the World. If (a), then it must be Eternal. But this cannot be since the only Eternal Reality is God. If (b), then it must be explained how or from what the Nothing was created. Was it created from another Nothing, perhaps? If so, where did that other, earlier Nothing come from?

Thus the proponent of Nothing drives himself into a corner from where there is no escape. He must either openly admit defeat and accept the fact that the World is God's Own Projection or Extension into manifest existence, or he may attempt to avoid defeat by interpreting "from Nothing" as intended to mean a stage at which nothing was yet created. However, this interpretation would refer only to a state of being prior to Creation without describing the substance from which the World was created. Hence it does not constitute proof for the purposes of our investigation.

In short, the Out-of-Nothing position is untenable and it must be admitted that the World cannot have been created from Nothing but must have been created from Something. All we need to establish is what that Something is. There are two conditions that must be fulfilled in this process. Firstly, the investigation must be conducted on the basis of Scriptural evidence and secondly, the result must be acceptable to rational people.

Beginning with the first condition, we may observe that all major religions or their Scriptures, admit that (1) in the beginning, God alone existed and (2) everything comes from God.

Now, if nothing else existed apart from God (not even the Nothing discussed above) then He must have created the World out of Himself.

To say that the World was created from something other than God, would give rise to a whole string of problems of which we may enumerate a few: (1) it would demand an explanation as to what that Something is, where it comes from, what are its attributes, etc.; (2) it would amount to denying the Unity of Life; (3) it would force God to assume a limited position to make place for a second Reality; (4) it would make God dependent on external factors and undermine His Omnipotence; (5) it would make the Creation

fundamentally different from God and hence incapable of experiencing Unity with the Creator. And last, but not least, such a position would contradict the Scriptures and thereby disqualify itself as Scriptural teaching.

On the other hand, if we admit that the World was indeed created by God out of Himself, then the following will happen: (1) we will remain true to the evidence of Scripture; (2) we will be true to the Unity of Life; (3) we will be true to the Supremacy and Omnipotence of God; (4) we will be true to Reason which was given to us by God for the purpose of finding Truth; (5) we will rest assured that, being consubstantial with, or essentially of the same substance as, God we are capable of experiencing Unity with Him. Finally, we will establish harmony between all the various religions of the World. All this would be a formidable accomplishment indeed, and an unparalleled contribution to Unity and Peace on Earth!

We have already observed that nowhere do the Scriptures state that God created the World out of Nothing. So let us see what the Scriptures really say. Says the Bible: "God is Light and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John, 1:5); "All things were made by Him; and there was nothing without (outside of, beside) Him. In Him was Life and the Life was the light of men" (John 1:3-4). The Essenes of Qumran, an important faith originated in pre-Christian Palestine with close links to Christianity, taught that: "From the God of Knowledge comes all that is and shall be" (The Community Rule, IQS 3,15). The Bible says: "All things are of Him and through Him and for Him" (Rom. 11:36).

The Quran says: "All things in Heaven and on Earth are from Him and to Him all things return" (3:109); "Whichever way you turn there is the Face of God: He is Omnipresent and All-Knowing" (2:115). And again the Bible: "There is but One God, the Father (Creator), from Whom are all things and we in Him" (1 Cor. 8:6); "In Him all things hold together" (Col. 1:16-17); "In Him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts. 17:28), etc. The great puzzle which is Mankind's diverse religious heritage begins to fall into place when all the key passages in the various Scriptures are put together to form a harmonious whole!

That God created the World out of Himself is even more clearly expressed in the Scriptures of the Ancient Egyptians, where it is said: "I am a Spirit who came into being and was created out of the Body of God, I am one of the Gods who dwell in the sunshine, whom God created from His Own Flesh (that is, out of Himself)", etc. (The Chapters of Coming-forth by Day).

Since the Egyptian is the oldest among Western traditions, it is also the closest to the Original Revelation which today is most faithfully represented by the Eastern (Indian) faiths, having only survived in a diluted and often misinterpreted form in the West. This Original Revelation (Adi Dharma) teaches that God created the World out of Himself, there being nothing else beside Him.

The fact is that God is Light: the Light of Knowledge, of Consciousness, of Intelligence. And there is nothing else beside. Since we are created out of that Light, this means that Man and the World are consubstantial with God, that is, consisting of essentially the same substance as God. Are we not intelligent beings and the Creation of the One Supreme Intelligence? We are lights from the Light of God. Or, as Scripture declares, we are "sparks from the Divine Light".

The Scriptures of Ancient Egypt likewise say: "I am a Great One, the son of a Great One, I am a Flame, the son of a Flame. I indeed am the Great God, Lord of Eternity". Again, since nothing exists apart from the Light of God, it follows that all created things come into being, exist and pass away, within that Light. Is God not Omnipresent? Is He not everywhere? Wherever we look, there is God, manifested as a multitude of things.

This position is in full agreement with Eastern, Dharmic (Dharma-based) traditions such as Yoga, Hinduism and Buddhism which teach the Unity and essential Identity of Man, World and God. As we have just shown, it is also in agreement with the Scriptures of the Western faiths. Those who claim that God created the World out of Nothing or from a substance other than Himself or that we exist somewhere

outside of God, contradict not only reason but also their own Scriptures and create problems that are as unnecessary as they are impossible to solve.

Now the purpose of true religion is not to create problems but to solve them. And this is exactly what Yoga with its insistence on Absolute Unity does. Even modern Science is beginning to accept the essential Unity of everything. Indeed, Reality can only be known from the perspective of Unity. A divisive, fragmentary perspective can only result in fragmentary knowledge of Reality. Therefore, the perspective of Unity alone enables us to correctly understand all religious traditions of the World and recognise the One Eternal Truth behind their superficial differences.

The Unitive Perspective of Yoga even makes sense of the Western Creation-out-of-Nothing view. From the perspective of Yoga, this view simply represents a corruption of the Yogic teaching of Emptiness which says that the state immediately preceding Creation was Emptiness (Shunyata): in the same way as a lake without fish and other forms of visible life may be said to be empty even though it is full of water, or as a hall may be said to be empty (of people and objects) even though it is full of light and air, or as the human mind may be said to be empty prior to the conception of a thought even though it is full of intelligence, that is, the power to know and to think, so also the Universe prior to Creation may be said to be empty of created things even though it is full of the Light of God.

In Yoga, Emptiness has another sense also, namely, that from the perspective of God the World is empty of things other than Himself Who experiences all things as One with Himself and hence "empty" or devoid of separate existence. An admission to this fact is found even in the Western Scriptures such as the Bible, where it is said that in the beginning, "the Earth was without form and empty" (Genesis 1:1).

Thus, far from being "Nothing", Spiritual Void or Emptiness (Shunyata) is really Objectless Consciousness. It is a Higher Form of Intelligence devoid of created or manifested things yet containing in itself the potentiality of all conceivable and inconceivable things. It is God's Own Undifferentiated, Formless Intelligence out of which anything and everything may be born or produced according to His Own Free and Independent Will.

This apparent Emptiness when incorrectly understood can give rise to the negative and erroneous notion of Nothing. In reality, however, there is no such thing as a Nothing out of which the World could have been Created.

Finally, the expression Out of Nothing can also be taken metaphorically as an illustration of God's Infinite Power and a reminder of the creature's absolute dependence upon Him: Creation is Nothing without the Creator. This is a fact which nobody can reasonably deny.

Original Man was a Being Divine

Concerning the creation of living things, the Holy Scriptures of India such as Shiva Purana, clearly state that the Supreme Being (Parama Shiva), having assumed the form of the Creator God (Brahma), produced out of Himself the four classes of beings in the following order: Gods (or Angels), Divine Ancestors, Humans and Subhuman Creatures.

Man himself was created as a manifestation of the two aspects of God's Own Inner Being: Consciousness (Shiva) and Energy (Shakti), Spirit and Nature, Mind and Matter, Male and Female.

Man was called Manu - from Manas, Mind - because he is the product of God's Own Mind and because he thinks, that is, lives primarily by mental thought-processes as opposed to the Gods and Divine Ancestors who are guided by the wisdom of their Souls, on one hand, and to Subhuman Creatures (animals, demons, etc.) who are guided by lower instincts, on the other.

Now as Original Man was known as Adi Manu and his consort was known as Manavi, the First Couple came to be known in later, Western Faiths as Adam and Ava (or Eve). Although the Divine nature of the first human beings has fallen into oblivion in the West, its memory has remained alive in the East down to this day. Says the Shiva Purana: "Original Man is Shiva and Original Woman is His Beloved. All men are identical with Shiva (God) and all women are identical with Maheshvari (the Great Goddess). Therefore, all men and women are manifestations of their (Shiva and Maheshvari's) Divine Powers."

A faint echo of this Spiritual Fact is still found in the Scriptures of the West. For example, in the older portion of the Bible (Old Testament), God says: "We created them in Our Own Image, both male and female". Indeed, God is both Male and Female, and at the same time He is Neither, being above physical manifestation. He is the Potentiality of everything that exists, the Storehouse of Infinite Possibilities, the Boundless Ocean of Life out of which all the differentiated waves of limited life arise. This is why, in the Yoga Tradition, God (Shiva) is called Lord of All (Vishveshvara).

The Wheel of Life

A very important contribution Eastern Faiths have made to our understanding of the Universe, is the concept of Cyclical Life (Samsara). At a higher, transcendental level, Life is Eternal, without Beginning or End, and Changeless. At a lower, manifestational level, on the other hand, Life is a series of recurring phases or cycles.

In the Rig Veda, man's life is described as going up and down, like the rolling wheels of carts. In the Upanishads, life is compared to a water-wheel (that revolves again and again to raise water for irrigation, etc.). This cycle or wheel-like process of life becomes manifest from the observation of everyday facts: day follows night, one season follows another, plants blossom and bear fruit every year anew, animals give birth to new offspring, etc.

In terms of human life, man undergoes periodic changes in energy levels, he experiences emotional highs and lows, he alternately sleeps and wakes, while in the long run, he dies and is reborn again many times. From a wider perspective, the World itself undergoes similar recurring patterns, the main phases of which are known as Yugas or World Ages.

Thus in the First or Golden (that is, Enlightened) Age, the Earth is ruled by Divine Beings; in the Second or Silver (that is, less Luminous) Age, it is ruled by Divine Ancestors; in the Third or Copper (Darkening) Age, it is ruled by Man; and in the Fourth or Iron (Dark) Age Earth is ruled by Subhuman creatures such as Spiritually undeveloped, materialistic, animal-like humans, demons (Asuras), etc. A brief glance at the quality of "leaders" in charge of the World today, will confirm that Mankind has entered the Age of Darkness, which is the Fourth and Last World Age.

When the World has reached its lowest point of Spiritual Degeneration, it is dissolved or withdrawn back into the Creator. Says Scripture: "This World, which is a mass of thought, is thought by Him, and in Him it disappears" (Maitri Upanishad 6:17). After a period of Cosmic Rest (Laya), a New World is brought forth and a New World Cycle begins. This periodic remake of Creation is also supported by Western Scriptures. For example, the Bible compares the World with a tree. The comparison is mainly intended to illustrate how the Kingdom of God spreads like a tree growing from a tiny seed; however, as seeds do not appear out of nothing, but come from earlier trees, it may also be taken to illustrate the re-creation of the World in the same way as a new tree is born from the seed of an old one. Similarly, Islam stresses Nature's periodic return to life. Says the Quran: "Do they not see how God conceives Creation and then renews it? That is easy enough for Him" (29:19).

We have thus demonstrated that all religious traditions agree with the Teachings of Yoga or, if they disagree, then it is entirely due to their own incomplete or incorrect understanding of the Original Truth as revealed in the Holy Scriptures of India (Dharma Agama).

Creation vs. Evolution

A common misconception found in the West is that we must choose between Creationism and Evolutionism. Creationism is a Judaeo-Christian-Islamic belief according to which God created the World as it is. Evolutionism is a materialist belief according to which the World evolved over long periods of time from an undefinable substance called "matter" and without the aid of a higher intelligence. The latter is also known as Darwinism, after the British naturalist and evolution theorist, Charles Darwin, who developed this thesis in the 19th century.

Eastern Faiths, in particular, Yoga, offer an alternative teaching which includes elements of both Creationism and Evolutionism. We know from experience that humans are born, grow old and die. So do animals and plants, forests, mountains, lakes, rivers and seas. In consequence, it is unreasonable to suppose that the World was created as it is.

On the other hand, we know that objects which are endowed with a specific ordered design, purpose and function, such as houses, tools, cars, nests, burrows, etc., are created by intelligent beings. As similar design, purpose and function may be found in naturally-occurring things, it is reasonable to conclude that they, and by extension, the entire World, too, were created by some form of intelligence.

The fact is that the Universe is not random and chaotic but is constructed according to a certain order. It also performs the practical function of supporting life. It is therefore logical to conclude that the Universe is the work of an Intelligent Creator and that life evolves according to an intelligent design. Thus Yoga, as an inclusive and unitive faith, reconciles Creationism and Evolutionism, elegantly solving one of mankind's oldest problems.

Teaching people that they accidentally evolved from monkeys and other animals, will only encourage them to think and behave like their supposed ancestors as is evidenced by the inhuman behaviour of many Communists, Capitalists and other Materialists. On the other hand, telling them that they are intelligent Souls emanating from God even as rays radiate from the Sun, will inspire them to elevate themselves through pure and righteous behaviour and noble thoughts and aspire for higher planes of existence, as evidenced by Enlightened Yogis.

Evolutionism therefore must be strongly rejected even if it were true. It must be even more strongly rejected since it is patently untrue.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 18

WAR AND PEACE

QUESTION: What is the position of Yoga on war, peace and non-violence?

ANSWER: In common with all Dharmic Traditions (Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism), Yoga teaches that **Non-violence (Ahimsa)** must be the fundamental basis to a life in Unity with Truth.

Indeed, many traditional Yogic texts count Non-violence as the first of the **Ten Commandments of Yoga**, the other nine being: Truthfulness (Satya), Not Stealing (Asteya), Right Sexual Conduct (Dharmacharya), Detachment from Material Possessions (Aparigraha), Austerity (Tapas), Spiritual Study (Svadhyaya), Purity (Shaucha), Contentment (Santosha) and Worship of God (Ishvara-Pujana).

Yoga teaches that the Universe is God's Creation. More importantly, it teaches that God lives in all creatures. For this reason, all living things must be treated with respect. Those who mistreat or kill animals are sure to sink into Hell, declare the Holy Scriptures of India. Even plants must not be damaged or destroyed without good reason. Non-violence, therefore, permeates all aspects of Yogic life.

The Yogic Principle of Ahimsa has become a universally recognised principle that not only became the very foundation of Indian culture and civilisation but it spread to the rest of the World, including the West. For example, it may be found in the Hippocratic Oath taken by doctors in Ancient Greece and among the Ten Commandments of the Bible.

However, Non-violence is not to be taken as an absolute law but as a general principle that does not exclude violence (or forceful action) as a legitimate means of upholding peace, order and justice if and when peaceful means either have patently failed or are reasonably expected to fail.

The fact is that Non-violence only works if practised by all. Indeed, were Non-violence to be practised in an absolute sense in all circumstances by a section of Humankind only, the World would be ruled by aggressive people who take advantage of the others' excessive love of peace (or fear of violence).

We can see what happens in the animal kingdom where aggressive animals prey on peaceful ones. Yet even there, normally peaceful creatures such as cattle can be fiercely protective of their young and ready to defend themselves if attacked. Indeed, all creatures, from the elephant down to the ant will fight to defend their life and territory. It is therefore unreasonable to expect humans not to defend themselves against those who intend to harm them or their fellow humans. To see somebody being assaulted and refrain from helping him on the grounds of non-violence is both absurd and inhuman.

The fact is that, in allowing an evil-doer to commit a crime, we (a) allow the victim to suffer and (b) sentence the perpetrator to a guaranteed (future) punishment from which he could have been saved, had we acted to prevent the crime from being committed. In the light of this, it becomes evident that violent, forceful or aggressive actions performed in the interest of upholding life, peace, justice and truth, must be recognised as being in accord with the general principle of Non-violence, being aimed at, and ultimately resulting in, the establishment or reinforcement of peace and order.

Thus the Holy Scriptures of India declare: "There is no greater virtue than Non-violence. Even Violence committed according to scriptural injunctions is to be praised as Non-violence" (Kurma Purana II.11.15).

Lawful Killing

According to Yoga, man has no power, indeed, no life of his own. He derives the powers of knowledge and action, whereby he lives his life, from the Universal Consciousness or God. He is therefore under the obligation to use those powers as intended by the Giver and true Owner of the powers and not as he pleases. In other words, man must live in Unity with Truth. Indeed, Truth and Life are one and the same. This fact is acknowledged in Yoga by the use of closely related words to describe both Life (Satta) and Truth (Satya). In consequence, only life in unity with Truth can qualify as true life, properly speaking. A life of crime, violence and sin is the opposite of True Life as it leads not to life but to death, destruction and untruth.

For this reason, the life of violent criminals and terrorists, for example, may be taken for the purpose of preserving the life of peaceful and law-abiding citizens. Criminals and terrorists, after all, are well-acquainted with both the rules and the consequences of breaking the rules. The decision to commit a crime is always a deliberate and informed one. If they reform themselves and take to the Path of Righteousness, they should be welcomed with open arms. If, however, they adhere to evil ways, the shock of being deprived of their own life will certainly put them on the right path in a future existence. Punitive force, therefore, may well be applied for reasons of compassion and result in good. By contrast, Non-violence or tolerance of crime can result in an increase in crime and therefore defeat its own purpose.

While Peace is always desirable, the fact is that Justice is more important than Peace. Without Justice, there can be no true Peace. A dictator may preserve Peace by suppressing all legitimate dissent against him, but people will know in their heart that this is unjust and the sense of injustice will prevent them from enjoying peace of mind. Moreover, an injustice once committed will tend to attract further injustice and whatever superficial Peace has been forcibly established will ultimately collapse and give way to conflict. Therefore, Justice may sometimes require that physical force be applied on the part of the righteous.

Even from a legal point of view, it is lawful to take the life of another man in self-defence or in the defence of others. It would be unreasonable for a man to be sent to prison for killing an intruder who enters his house in the middle of the night with the intention to commit a crime, or a soldier who kills enemies in battle. The same is true from a Spiritual perspective. Thus the Shiva Purana clearly states that he who takes the life of one who is inimical to Lord Shiva, shall not be reborn, that is, he will go to Heaven and enjoy everlasting life. Even if he were to lose his own life in the fight without slaying the enemy, he shall be liberated along with his family for twenty-one generations.

The twelfth-century Shaiva Teacher Basava, similarly declared that a person who disparages or belittles Shiva, should be put to death (Siddhanta-Shikhamani 9, 36). This may sound a little extreme in the materialistic World of today where belief in God is treated with derision and contempt by anti-Spiritual elements in the media, political establishment and education authorities.

However, a little reflection will show that the ancients were not quite as unreasonable as it may sound. Shiva or God, is the Supreme Principle of Goodness and the Source of everything that is good. If a man opposes God, he opposes Goodness upon which righteous life rests. Those who oppose the fundamental principles of human life commit a crime against Humanity. They are evil men and the enemies of both men and God. They deserve to be punished unless, of course, they repent and take to the Path of Righteousness. Yoga is a just and compassionate faith.

Nor must we lose sight of the fact that the highest Goal of Yoga is to destroy one's own **inner enemies**, such as ignorance, greed, hatred, laziness and so on. By overcoming the inner enemies, we will be more successful in conquering our outer foes.

Suicide

Another form of violence or physical force that is expressly permitted in the Scriptures is suicide. Yoga teaches that human life must be conducted in such a way as to preserve every man's honour and dignity. If living in dignity becomes impossible, then man should at least be given the opportunity to die in a dignified manner. The taking of one's own life on the grounds of terminal illness, to avoid excessive suffering, humiliation or captivity, or for religious motives is permitted in Spiritual Law.

The Shiva Purana declares that **"he who willingly forsakes his life as prescribed in the Scriptures of Shiva, be it by fasting, by consigning his body to a holy fire, or by plunging into rivers that are sacred to Shiva, shall attain salvation without fail"**.

Equally meritorious is the practice of the Rite of the Great Departure (Mahaprasthan) whereby one may "walk, fully determined and following a straight path, in a north-easterly direction, subsisting on nothing but water and air, until his body sinks to rest. A pious man, having cast off his body by one of the methods practised by Great Sages, shall be exalted in Heaven and shall be free from fear and sorrow" (Manu Smriti VI, 31-32).

What must be emphasised is that for the termination of one's own life to qualify as lawful certain criteria must be first met. The most important of these is that it must not harm other living beings.

The only exception to this are suicidal acts that harm one's enemies or the enemies of one's country, for example, in times of war. Such acts are permitted and even commended in Spiritual Law. It goes almost without saying that Spiritual people must not hesitate to lay down their lives in the cause of Dharma when such action is likely to cause harm to the enemy or encourage the righteous.

Secondly, suicide must be a voluntary action that is carried out deliberately, as a lucid and rational decision. Suicidal acts committed under the influence of intoxicant substances or negative emotional states like grief, anger, etc., are to be avoided as far as possible as they may adversely affect one's future life.

An ideal death must occur in a state of mind characterised by calmness and alert detachment in order for the dying person to secure happiness in his next life.

Assisted suicide falls under the same category as suicide and is accordingly permitted in Yoga in certain circumstances. To this we may count **euthanasia** (compassionate killing) as practised in some Western countries, the Hindu custom of **sati (suttee)** as well as the ancient Japanese ritual of **seppuku**.

We may observe that other faiths fully agree with this fundamental Yogic teaching. Thus Western Scriptures clearly state that "Death is better than a bitter life and eternal rest than sickness" (Ecclesiasticus 30:17).

War for Peace and Righteousness

As far as war situations are concerned, it is essential to understand that from the beginning of written history war has been part of human existence. This is still true in many parts of the World today. Even developed countries who have enjoyed peace for decades have only succeeded to do so by exporting their conflicts to undeveloped countries. Expressions such as "spoils of war" are based on facts of history: the wealth and status of most leading nations in the World today were built on acts of war against other countries - not to mention piracy and slave trade.

In a World devoid of proper Spiritual Guidance, conflict is often unavoidable. And since conflicts cannot always be resolved by peaceful means, war often becomes necessary. The position of Yoga on this point is not only logical but is also supported by all major Spiritual traditions. In the Hindu Scripture, Bhagavat Gita for example, Lord Krishna clearly advocates military action not only as a legitimate form of self-defence but as a Spiritual duty.

Likewise, it is written in Hindu Law (Manu Smriti, VII, 87-88): "A king who, while observing his duty of protecting his people, is defied by foes, be they equal in strength, or stronger, or weaker, must not shrink from battle, remembering a Warrior's duty. Not to turn back in battle, to protect the people, to honour the holy Priests, is the best means for a king to secure happiness". And: **"He who kills in the cause of right commits no sin"** (VIII, 349). Moreover, those who refuse to give assistance according to the duties (to which they have been appointed by the King) or to their ability, such as in the case of a village being attacked by robbers or a dyke being destroyed, etc., are actually committing a punishable offence (ibidem, IX, 272-274).

Among Buddhists, some supporters of Non-violence point out that, in an earlier incarnation, the Buddha himself is said to have offered his own flesh to a tigress that due to illness was unable to feed her cubs. To this it may be replied that the Buddha's action may have been appropriate in that particular life, but that he did not repeat this in his last incarnation as a Buddha, when physical self-sacrifice would have frustrated his World-enlightening teaching activities.

It may also be legitimately argued that, if 20th century Tibetan Buddhists had taken care to set up a proper defence system, then perhaps they would not have been invaded and subjected to oppression and genocide by Communist China. Indeed, historical evidence shows that Buddhist monks hailing from India were

responsible for the dissemination of both Buddhism and martial arts over large areas of Asia. Buddhist countries are known to have opted for military action whenever this was seen as necessary.

In consequence, forceful action for the purpose of self-defence or reinforcement of law and order does not appear to have been viewed as incompatible with Buddhist teachings in former times.

Historically speaking, military action has often proved to influence the life of many people in positive ways despite the suffering and loss of life it may cause. It must be regarded as beyond dispute, for example, that the German Uprising against British World hegemony in the first half of the 20th century led to the dissolution of the British Empire, enabling many nations, including India, to gain freedom from British domination.

Armed struggle against foreign invasion and occupation is at any rate universally accepted as legitimate. The Shiva Purana (Uma Samhita, 20:33), a Hindu Scripture closely allied to the Yoga Tradition says: "A righteous war is conducive to the attainment of Heaven. It sanctifies and increases the manifold beauty of a man". And: "He who falls in battle without surrendering his weapons attains to Everlasting Heaven" (20:25).

Likewise, in the Christian Gospel (Luke 22:36), Jesus tells his followers to sell their clothes and buy swords (presumably for purposes of self-defence). He also tells them: "But those enemies of mine who would not submit themselves to my rule, bring here and slay them before me" (Luke 19:27). And again: "You shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that you be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass" (Matthew 24:6). In other words, it is admitted that violence and wars are sometimes necessary and cannot be avoided. In this particular case, Jesus was referring to the Jewish uprising against Roman Rule in the years 66-70 CE.

Statements of a similar nature may be found in the Scriptures of Judaism, Islam and other faiths. Thus the great Guru and Prophet of the Sikhs, Govind Singh, said: "When all other means have failed, it is righteous to draw the sword". And the Quran declares: "Fighting is obligatory for you, much as you dislike it. But you may hate a thing although it is good for you, and love a thing although it is bad for you" (2:216).

Fighting in a righteous cause is good for a number of reasons. It is good because it is conducive to the establishment of Universal Order and Justice (Dharma) and hence constitutes a fulfilment of Divine Will. It is good because it enables the fighter to overcome selfishness and fear which is one of the greatest obstacles in life in general and in Spiritual life, in particular. It is good because the hardships endured by a fighter, including injury and death, constitute a sure means of cleansing oneself of sins that would otherwise be difficult to eradicate. For this reason it has been said that those who lay down their earthly life in the cause of Dharma (Divine Law), shall receive the greatest honours.

The same position may be found among the Ancient Greeks and Romans for whom laying down one's life for the sake of one's country and one's faith was not only a religious duty but a great honour. Thus speaks the celebrated poet Horatius: "And how can man die better than facing fearful odds, for the ashes of his fathers and the Temples of his Gods?".

RIGHTEOUS or JUST WAR (DHARMA YUDDHA), therefore, must be admitted to be a well-established universal principle.

Forceful action in the face of adversity is often the only means of establishing good. On the other hand, misguided kindness may actually result in evil. If, for example, unreformed criminals are pardoned or released from prison, they will invariably return to crime which could have been prevented had they been treated less kindly.

Therefore, the Shiva Purana declares: "Kindness towards violent enemies is not ultimately conducive to good. He who is kind to such ones is really unkind even though his unkindness is concealed by

apparent kindness. It is therefore established that kindness does not always result in good" (Vayaviya Samhita I, 31:39-42).

The fact is that peace-fanatics can do just as much damage to themselves, their families and their country as compulsive warmongers. On the other hand, it is beyond dispute that war that results in peace and justice is to be preferred to peace that results in conflict and injustice. All major Spiritual traditions hold both violent and non-violent action to be legitimate according to the requirements of a given situation. This is a position with which the Yoga Tradition itself is in complete agreement.

After all, Spiritual life and, for that matter, true Democracy, are not about complacency and implicit acceptance of disorder and crime but about having the courage to fight evil and defend justice in the same way, for example, as a living organism fights disease. For this reason, it is every man's duty to uproot evil and cultivate what is good, that Dharma (Divine Law) may be established in all quarters of the Earth.

Yoga therefore teaches that it is every responsible person's duty to actively support Universal Order on Earth either by peaceful means, if possible, or by forceful means, if necessary. From among India's most noble warriors (both human and Divine) who are celebrated for their heroic deeds, we may mention Lord Murugan (Karttikeya), Lord Rama, King Skanda Gupta and Shivaji Maharaj.

The Iraq War

As the Coalition-led war in Iraq (2003-2004) has been the cause of much controversy among nations, it will be pertinent to take it as an illustration for the practical application of Yogic principles. While some have declared it to be illegal, others have seen it as a righteous war that was necessary in order to remove an evil dictator from power.

Among those who opposed the war, we may mention the United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan. Firstly, Mr Annan is an economist by profession and not a lawyer. He cannot therefore make any legal pronouncements. Secondly, the UN has been exposed by former UN ambassador, Dore Gold, and others, as one of the most corrupt and dangerous organisations in the World that cannot claim to hold the moral high ground it seeks to establish for itself. Thirdly, the UN is quite happy to accept the Chinese occupation of Tibet, the Turkish occupation of Kurdistan and the Pakistani occupation of Kashmir, among many other illegal actions perpetrated by a number of rogue nations all over the World. Fourthly, the UN has manifestly failed to offer any viable alternative to war in Iraq. In these circumstances, it is difficult to see how Mr Annan can object to Anglo-American actions.

Indeed, on strict logic, dictating to a sovereign country when it should or should not conduct military actions (in self-defence or in the defence of others) against another country, amounts to denying the sovereignty of that country. Sovereign nations who have their own, lawfully elected leaders, cannot be expected to put their interests in the hands of a Mr Annan. One can make a moral judgement as to whether or not a particular military action is justified. The problem with that is that human morality is a highly subjective thing, all the more so when it is tainted by political, cultural, religious or financial commitments.

From a Spiritual perspective, there cannot be any objection to military action carried out for the purpose of removing an evil dictator from power and preventing the deliberate oppression and murder of millions of innocent people.

Yoga, therefore, has no problem with the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq. However, the way in which the post-war situation is handled by the invading forces is a different matter. It will remain to be seen whether the Coalition is as adept at making peace as it is at making war.

The War on Terrorism

The same principles that apply to Iraq are also applicable to the war on International Terrorism: **It is right to invade, attack or otherwise punish countries that are patently sponsoring terrorism and threatening World Peace, Stability and Unity.**

India, the Holy Land of Yoga and all Dharmic Faiths, has for centuries had to defend herself against attacks by the forces of foreign terrorism. The main sponsors of terrorism in the World today are Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Saudi Arabian forces have been attacking India since the Middle Ages.

NOTE: It is important to understand that Pakistan and Bangladesh were part of India until 1947 when they were surrendered to the forces of radical Islam by the Communist (Congress) rulers of India in collaboration with the British colonial authorities. These Indian territories are now under Muslim occupation and are being used as a base for attacks on India and other countries (al-Qaida is an Arabic word for "base").

The main objectives of the Arabia-Pakistan-Bangladesh axis are to drive all Hindus out of the formerly Hindu Kingdom of Kashmir (North India) and cause as much disruption as possible to the economy of India. This is done through massive infiltration by extremist Islamist elements as well as attacks on buses, trains, schools, temples, financial centres and government buildings. The fact is that if the problem is not urgently resolved, India will soon fall into the hands of terrorists and the World will sink into a state of unprecedented Spiritual and material darkness.

The situation is further complicated by Communist China's anti-Indian activities such as the occupation of Tibet and sponsoring terrorist groups who now practically control large areas in the Eastern parts of India, including Nepal. Other countries such as North America and Britain need to revise their own anti-Indian policies. American and British people must ask themselves whether selling arms to India's aggressive neighbours (e.g., Pakistan) and imposing Western culture on Indian people constitutes an act of friendship towards that country.

In addition to these external attacks against India we may observe that elements within India's own ruling classes - which are largely dominated by Soviet-style left-wing organisations - are equally engaged in anti-Indian acts of subversion, sabotage and collaboration with the Enemy Forces.

Given that there is no political will to resolve this problem, the only solution is for Spiritual leaders and the armed forces in their capacity as true guardians of India to assume leadership and immediately proceed to defend the nation against her declared enemies. The Forces of Global Atheism, Communism and Islamic Terrorism must be driven out of the Holy Land of India which is the Glorious Abode of Righteousness and the Bastion of the Supreme Eternal Law (Sanatana Dharma) on Earth.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 19

DHARMATYAGA (APOSTASY)

QUESTION: How does Yoga view faith-related matters such as apostasy, conversion, atheism, etc.?

ANSWER: To conduct a meaningful discussion of what constitutes Apostasy, we need to establish the meaning of the word "faith". **Faith** is often regarded as a set of beliefs and practices that are freely interchangeable with other such sets. In other words, something people can pick and choose, or abandon, as

they please. **Apostasy** or **Dharmatyaga** is the renunciation of one's own faith. For this reason it is also known as **Sva-Dharmatyaga**.

However, it is important to understand that, although the word **Dharma** may mean "faith" or "religion" in general, its primary meaning in Yoga is **Original, Eternal Divine Law** whereby the Universe is governed and which all intelligent beings have a duty to obey.

DHARMA, therefore, is not just any faith but the RIGHT or TRUE FAITH that cannot be abandoned or exchanged for another under any circumstances as it is the very foundation of righteous life. To abandon or exchange it for anything else would amount to falling from the Right Path.

The Holy Scriptures of India clearly state that "he who treats with contempt the two Sacred Sources, Revelation and Tradition, must be cast out by the virtuous, as an atheist and a scorner of Sacred Scripture. (Manu Smriti II, 11)." We shall presently show what is meant by Revelation (Shruti) and Tradition (Smriti).

Dharma - the True Faith

It is an established fact that **Dharma** was the Original Faith of all Mankind. It was the Eternal, **Ever Existing Law of the Universe** according to which all creatures lived their life in unity and harmony with their Creator. This is why all religions speak of a Glorious Past, a Golden Age or Paradise. If we examine the various traditions of the World we will see how all of them are just different forms of **Dharma** (see **Unity of Faiths**).

To understand the great antiquity of this Original World Faith we only need to look at the archaeological evidence. For example, images of Deities represented as half-lion and half-human have been found in Europe (Germany) and were dated by scientists to 30,000 years ago. More recent, yet similar, images are found in the religion of Ancient Egypt. What is even more remarkable is that the same Deity is still honoured in India, in the form of Lord Narasingha (Man-Lion), to this day!

From the perspective of Western faiths that have a very narrow and rigid conception of the Divine, such representations of the Deity may be misinterpreted as "idol-worship" or "worship of false Gods". In reality, however, Lord Narasingha is nothing but the Embodiment of Divine Powers such as Strength, Courage and Justice, which, if we think about it, should be honoured by all people on Earth. In human terms, Narasingha means an eminent or excellent man, a hero or lion among men.

The Original Faith was an integral, multifunctional belief system in which various gradations of the Divine were honoured according to each worshipper's capacity and needs. The fact is that God's Majesty and Glory is Infinite and therefore incapable of being grasped in its entirety by the human mind. The obsessive worship of one Aspect of God to the exclusion of all others is a Western aberration that results in imbalance and insanity.

Indeed, in the **Original Tradition (Adidharma)** the worship of various aspects of the Divine was permitted precisely because it fulfils certain psychological and Spiritual needs specific to each person. These needs, when left unrecognised, unattended or even repressed, can lead to serious mental and Spiritual disfunction.

It is not mere coincidence that many Westerners feel the need of regular visits to psychiatrists, psychotherapists, "life coaches", etc.: having systematically eliminated genuine Spiritual guidance from their lives, they can no longer function as proper human beings. Hence the need for all kinds of artificial props, including drugs. Westerners consume vast amounts of drugs, both legal and illegal. They take drugs

to calm them down, drugs to pick them up, drugs to enhance their sexual performance. Their whole life revolves round some kind of artificial prop or other.

By contrast, in Eastern countries like India, which have remained largely uninfluenced by anti-Spiritual trends such as Capitalism, Communism, Christianity and Islam, people perform time-honoured rituals that help them connect with Higher Beings, practise Yoga and Meditation or seek the help of Spiritual Gurus who can offer genuine guidance.

The fact is that Western Religions often leave their followers in a state of confusion, bitterness and dissatisfaction which either (1) drives them away from religion altogether (as in certain forms of Christianity) or (2) encourages them to attack other faiths in order to cover up the insufficiencies and defects of their own (as in radical Islam). The consequences of this deplorable situation are well known and need not detain us here. In contrast, Eastern Faiths promote a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment in their followers which is reflected in their enduring tolerance and openmindedness (as in Yoga, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.).

Therefore, the message and warning Yoga brings to the World is that, although the ORIGINAL FAITH has long been abandoned by large portions of Mankind, especially in the West, it has remained in man's subconscious where it is waiting to be rediscovered and allowed once again to fulfil its rightful function without which man cannot realise his higher destiny. Indeed, without the timeless wisdom of the Original Faith, Humanity cannot find Peace, Stability and Happiness, full stop.

The Original Faith

The above mentioned piece of archaeological evidence proves that India is one of the few places on Earth where believers have remained faithful to the Original Faith. We shall now briefly describe what constitutes the central teaching of this Faith.

The Holy Scriptures of India declare that **God is Light**: the Light of Truth, of Knowledge, of All-encompassing Intelligence. For this reason, God is called **Dyaus**, Deva, etc., meaning the Radiant One.

God creates man out of Himself, that is, from His Own Light like a ray from the Sun or a spark from the Fire. Being made of the same substance as God, man is essentially identical with God. Therefore, by knowing his innermost Self, man knows God. He knows the Highest Truth and as a result becomes worthy of entering Heaven where he can live in Unity with God.

Says Scripture: "He who knows the DIVINE IN MAN knows the Supreme Lord, and he who knows the Supreme Lord knows the Ground of all things" (Atharva Veda X, 7:17).

"Within the body there is the Pure One, **Consisting of Light**, Whom the Ascetics, with imperfections done away, behold. When a seer sees the brilliant Maker, the Lord, the Heavenly Person, the Divine Source, then he attains Supreme Identity with Him. He, verily, who knows that Supreme Deity, becomes that Deity. Liberated from sorrow and sin, he becomes Immortal" (Mundaka Upanishad III 1:3 - 2:9). All religious acts, including the worship of Divine Images, serves the purpose of helping us realise the Deity in our heart, the essential Identity of Soul and God.

Salvation or Freedom from Suffering and Death, therefore, is not ultimately attained through rituals and prayers directed at an external Deity, but by realising that our body is the Temple of God. By worshipping the Living God the Divine Light of Whom eternally shines within, we attain the Supreme Deity and enter His Infinite Kingdom of Light: "Attaining Him Who is the Universal Omnipresent", says Scripture, "those wise, devout Souls into the All itself do enter" (Mundaka Up.).

This very same Teaching is found in later, Western Scriptures. Says the Bible: "This is the message which we have heard of him and declare unto you, that **God is Light**, and in Him is no darkness at all"... "You are the Children of Light"... "You are the Temple of the Living God"... "Know you not that you are the Temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?", etc.

In the West, this Teaching is no longer taught except in one or two Spiritual circles among the Jewish Mystics, Christian Gnostics and Islamic Sufis. In the East, on the other hand, the True Teaching is still very much alive, especially in Yoga Dharma.

Indeed, Yoga, Hinduism and the other Dharmic Faiths of India, are currently the only Faiths in the World the central teaching of which is man's Oneness with God. Says the Shrimad Bhagavatam: "The Yogi whose mind is absorbed in meditation on the Oneness of the Soul with God - even as light joined unto light - rises above all limitations and realises the One, All-Pervading Reality" (VIII).

This Original Faith which is the expression of the Supreme Eternal Law was revealed to the World by the Supreme Being (Parama Shiva) Himself, at the beginning of time, as a Right Guidance for man so that he may walk on the Straight Path (Sat-Patha) and not lose his way in life.

It was only with the advent of the Age of Darkness (Kali Yuga) that man's ego grew to excessive proportions and started turning away from the True Faith. This is why all religions believe in a Dark Age of Sin into which Mankind has fallen after an original life of purity in Paradise.

Following Mankind's Fall, the Five Dharmic (Dharma-based) Faiths of India, Yoga, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism remained faithful to Eternal Dharma. For this reason, the Holy Land of India (Bharat Varsh, the Land of Glory) is called **Dharma-Bhumi**, that is to say, **Land of Righteousness or True-Faith Land**.

By contrast, Western Faiths (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) all have strayed from the Original Faith and created their own systems of religious belief and practice. Moreover, they systematically suppressed everything in the Old Faith that was of Spiritual and psychological value to man. Scholars have long established that the Jewish Bible has undergone much editing and no longer represents the Original Teaching. As the Christian Bible and Quran are largely based on the Jewish Scriptures, it follows that they too are a deviation from the True Faith.

Indeed, if you critically analyse Western Scriptures like the Bible or the Quran, you will clearly see that they are not Divine Revelations but man-made stories that may contain some Spiritual truths but are nevertheless a far cry away from the Original, Eternal and Only True Faith that can be found in Eastern Scriptures. The majority of Western Scriptures, therefore, must be regarded as **Moha Shastras**, that is, Deluded Scriptures which lead Mankind astray. Had they been True Scriptures, the World would be a better place today.

Infidels and True Believers

Followers of Eastern Faiths are not "infidels" but **true believers**. This becomes evident if we take the time to study the history of religions, a task which very few Westerners are inclined to undertake, for which reason they often fall prey to all manner of superstitions, prejudices and misbeliefs.

However, we must first establish the exact meaning of such expressions as "infidel" or "unbeliever" so that we know what we are talking about.

As far as Belief is concerned, Eastern Faiths do believe in a Divine Being and in the efficacy of certain practices that are based on Divine or Divinely inspired Revelation. It is, of course, true that Eastern Faiths

do not believe in Western Scriptures. But then they don't have to as they have their own Scriptures. The charge of Unbelief must, therefore, be rejected as a completely baseless and malicious fabrication.

We shall now turn to the charge of Infidelity. "Infidel" is a Latin word which means "unfaithful". In religious terms, it means unfaithful to God and His Revelation.

Now, as we have shown, Dharma was the Original Faith that existed long before the introduction of Western Faiths. Those that follow Dharma are the Yogis, Hindus, Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs. To these we may add the Pagans of Europe, Africa, America as well as the followers of the Bon Religion of Tibet, Taoism of China, Shintoism of Japan, Zoroastrianism of Persia and Ancient Judaism, which are all variations of the Original Faith (Adi Dharma). (Ancient Judaism is distinct from Modern Judaism. See [Image Worship](#).)

By contrast, the Western Faiths of Modern Judaism, Christianity and Islam, are those who have rejected the Original Faith and have turned to other faiths of their own making. They have taken some elements from the Original Faith while rejecting others.

For example, they have rejected Reincarnation and replaced it with "Resurrection" although there is nothing in their Scriptures to justify this. They have rejected the Gods and replaced them with "Angels", despite the fact that the Bible itself admits the existence of Gods.

If Westerners could prove that their faiths are older than the Eastern ones, it would be a different matter. But the evidence is that Dharma existed long before the introduction of Western Faiths.

It follows from this, that the followers of Non-dharmic, Western Faiths, that is, Christians, Muslims, etc., are apostates and dharmatyagis (defectors from the right faith) and guilty of treason and unfaithfulness to God, which is a great sin (Mahapataka). This should put paid to the spurious charge of "idolatry", "unbelief" and "infidelity" brought against Eastern Faiths by Western Religions.

One Path or many?

You might of course think that in the free World of today, we should have freedom of religious belief. Indeed, Yoga doesn't dispute people's freedom of belief. **But freedom to choose which faith to follow is no guarantee that you will choose the right one!**

It is often claimed that all paths lead to God in the same way as, to use a Western expression, all roads are supposed to lead to Rome. Well, it may be true that all roads lead to Rome, but if you asked a hundred people from different parts of the World to go to Rome, some would have to go over burning deserts, others over ice-covered mountains and others still over shark-infested waters. Only one road is short, pleasant and safe. Likewise, although many paths lead to God, some pass through Hell first. So we need to be careful about what path we choose.

In Yoga, we do not force anybody to follow any particular path, but we see it as our duty to warn the World that some paths are straighter, faster, more enjoyable and safer than others.

If the objection be raised as to why it is claimed by some Spiritual leaders that all paths are equal, the answer would be that they often say it out of courtesy. Indians are very courteous people who always avoid hurting other people's feelings. Another explanation is that, what they really mean to say is that any path is good for a start provided that the intention is right. In that case, no matter what path the genuine Seeker chooses, he will ultimately find the right path. Finally, there are those who make such statements out of ignorance or for some ulterior motive.

For example, it is claimed in certain politically or financially committed circles that "everything goes", but this is only a clever trick to convert unsuspecting people to dubious teachings and lead them away from the right path. Even Anarchists have rules, so it is difficult to see how they can tell others that "everything goes".

The same applies to different faiths or paths: we only need to think of the forced conversions, "holy wars", slavery and genocide the Western World has engaged in in the name of religion, and compare this with Yoga's own record of peace, tolerance, wisdom and compassion, to realise what a gigantic mistake it would be to believe the myth that all paths are literally the same!

Converting to other Faiths

We have already demonstrated that the true faiths are those that are closest to the Original Revelation (Adidharma) and their followers are the true or right believers. By contrast, Western Faiths must be regarded as rejectionist replacement-cults that not only have strayed from the Right Path but stand in opposition to it.

In consequence, Yoga strictly forbids the conversion of a person from a Dharmic Faith such as Yoga, Hinduism, etc., to an Adharmic Faith like Modern Judaism, Christianity or Islam. Indeed, since Dharmic Faiths provide a believer with everything he needs for his Spiritual and material progress, a conversion to other faiths would be not only wholly unnecessary but positively detrimental as it would bring about a Spiritual regression in the converted person. On the other hand, conversion from Non-Dharmic Faiths to Dharmic ones is permitted and even recommended.

The question that may legitimately arise at this point is, why would followers of the Dharma Tradition, which is the Supreme, Eternal and Incomparable Law of the Universe, want to convert to any surrogate faiths? The answer is that such a conversion can only happen out of ignorance.

In India, for example, some among the Right-Believing Community might see the apparent material advantages obtained by certain followers of Communism, Capitalism, Christianity or Islam and erroneously conclude that these are the right religions to follow. However, they only think so because they have failed to grasp the Spiritual Laws of the Universe and because they have been kept in ignorance of historical facts by foreign (and foreign-influenced) governments. The fact is that material gains like education, jobs, etc., have nothing to do with converting to replacement-religions. They are entirely the result of good karma.

To begin with, it is an undeniable fact that not all right believers (satdharmis) who are enticed to convert to replacement-faiths experience a lasting improvement in their material situation. Indeed, they invariably end up worse off than before.

We only need to take a look at Pakistan, Bangladesh, Kashmir and Afghanistan. These used to be prosperous countries while they were still part of India and their inhabitants followed the Right Faith. Since their conversion to Islam, however, their situation has deteriorated dramatically and their people are now stricken with poverty, terrorism and disease.

The same applies to most countries in Africa, South America and other parts of the World who converted to Christianity. Their conversion has not helped them even after hundreds of years!

If a few appear to be doing well, it is due to other, deeper factors: if somebody, on account of good deeds done in the past, deserves to be rewarded, he will be allowed to have his reward even while he is committing a crime. Even in human law, if a man has worked hard and honestly earned lots of money, the authorities cannot confiscate his property even if in a moment of drunkenness or madness he commits murder.

Likewise, God is always Just. He lets every man have his reward. However, when the good karma has either been exhausted or outweighed by bad karma, then the sinner will have to pay for his apostasy and the punishment for his unfaithfulness to the True Faith will come down on him with full force. In some cases this will come gradually like in a slow-gathering storm and in others suddenly like an unexpected downpour. But come it will.

This is the Law of Karma. Says Scripture: "Having had enjoyment in the highest heaven won by good works, they re-enter this World, or a lower" (Mundaka Upanishad). And: "Either as a worm, or as a moth, or as a snake, or as some other creature, man is reborn according to his deeds, according to his knowledge" (Katha Up.).

The fact is that even Western replacement-faiths admit that Apostasy is a sin. If renouncing a replacement-faith is a sin, then renouncing the True Faith (Sat-Dharma) is an even greater sin, surely!

It is a great sin to abandon one's own mother. To rise up against her is an even greater sin. Dharma is the Mother of all Faiths and Dharmic Faiths are her loyal children. Adharmic Faiths are guilty of abandoning the Mother Faith and guilty of matricide and so are their followers.

Secondly, it is important to understand that, for millennia, India has faithfully followed Hinduism and throughout that time she was one of the wealthiest countries on Earth. Even today, India remains rich in many natural resources. In the past five hundred years, however, due to foreign invasions, occupation, oppression and exploitation, this wealth has fallen under the control of a few corrupt individuals who are using every opportunity to prevent a just distribution of wealth.

This deplorable situation has been brought about by foreign invaders who are followers of false faiths and their Indian collaborators. People may have a short memory and even less knowledge of history. But facts are facts and cannot be ignored, forgotten or denied. Now by converting to Western Faiths, the convert unwittingly cooperates with the very faiths that have reduced the people of India to poverty and misery. In so doing, he commits a Spiritual crime. So even if he were to escape poverty for the time being, eventually he will have to answer for his transgression against the Eternal Law.

Thus the problem of conversion has many different aspects of which the following are only a few: (1) Abandonment of the Right Faith, (2) collaboration with the enemy, (3) bringing destruction upon one's own people. These are unforgivable sins which together suffice to bring suffering and damnation to the sinner for thousands of years!

If an ignorant man saw a bandit enjoying the wealth gained through crimes, he may be tempted to join him. But sooner or later both he and his fellow bandit will fall prey either to other bandits or to the wrath of the law. If man cannot even evade human justice, how much more difficult it will be to evade Divine retribution! The same applies to the crime of converting to false faiths.

The Holy Scriptures of India are very clear on this: "Let a man, though suffering in consequence of his Right Faith (Dharma), never turn his heart to Unrighteousness (Adharma); for he will see the overthrow of the unrighteous. Unrighteousness does not at once produce its fruit even as the Earth does not at once yield fruit; but advancing slowly, it cuts off the roots of him who wrought it. An unrighteousness once committed, never fails to produce fruit to him who committed it. He prospers for a while through Unrighteousness, but at last he perishes branch and root" (Manu Smriti IV, 171-174).

And the Mahabharata says: **"He who gives up the Path of Yoga is guilty of a great sin" (V, 52).** Therefore, make no mistake and have no doubts, because doubt is the first step on the wrong path that quickly branches out into the side-streets and short cuts to Hell.

The Duty of adhering to the True Faith

Dharma is not only the **One True Faith** but also the **Duty** of adhering to what is True. This being so, it is the duty of all right-believing men and women on Earth to warn the apostates of the fate that awaits them and call them to the Right Path. It is our duty to guide our wayward brethren to the True Faith in the same way as an elder brother has the duty to guide his younger, ignorant and confused siblings and in the same way as a shepherd has the duty to bring back the sheep that have strayed from the fold. Although some efforts are being done in this direction, it is far from enough. Our opponents are as clever and resourceful as they are evil, so we need to double our resolve and strike back with force.

As followers of the Yoga Path which is the Path of Unity with the Supreme, we do our best to promote Sanatana Dharma because it represents the culture in which True Spirituality has flourished for millennia; because it is a genuine religion that carries a genuine spiritual message; and because it is to Dharma that we owe our most cherished Spiritual experiences.

As Yoga, the Epitome of Dharma, is a highly evolved Spirituality, it is not always easy to explain all its complexities to outsiders who lack any Spiritual training. Nor is it necessary. It is sufficient to understand that Shiva is the Supreme Principle of Goodness and that Shiva Himself as Lord of Yoga revealed the teachings of Yoga to Humankind for its Spiritual upliftment. This is acceptable to everybody. After all, everybody can see for themselves that Yoga is a good thing. And everything that is good must logically come from a source that is itself good. The Source of all Goodness is Lord Shiva (God) Himself. And Yoga is the spiritual practice whereby man harmonises his life with that of Shiva, so that he can find happiness in this life and the next.

Yoga and Meditation classes are an excellent way of introducing people to the benefits of the True Faith. Unfortunately, some misguided individuals use Yoga classes for selfish, materialist reasons. They invent new forms of "Yoga" as a means of making money. Moreover, since many classes are run as aerobics-style enterprises, a growing number of attendants suffer all kinds of injuries. All this is very damaging to our cause. Yoga is sometimes seen as a physical, materialist endeavour or, even worse, as a strange cult that must be avoided.

In our opinion, since those who practise Yoga admit that it is a good thing, those who reject Yoga (especially when they haven't even tried it out) must be evil as only evil men can reject what is patently good. This does not mean to say that they are evil on purpose. Some, no doubt, are. But others may adopt a hostile attitude to Yoga due to ignorance.

It may be observed in this regard that, as reported in Middle Eastern and Indian papers (on 20 September 2004), the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Ali Gomaa declared that "Yoga is an aberration the practice of which is forbidden under Islamic Law".

Now Islam is said by its followers to mean "Submission to God". Similarly, Yoga means "Unity with God". It should be obvious even to less intelligent people that both Yoga and Islam share the same Spiritual goals. So on what ground can anybody claim that Yoga is "un-Islamic"?

Does the Quran say that Yoga is an aberration? No. Did Prophet Mohammad say that Yoga is an aberration? No. Did God appear to the Grand Mufti and told him that Yoga is an aberration? No. There is clearly no scriptural or Divine authority whatsoever for this kind of statement.

The fact is that true Submission is impossible without Unity. It follows from this that Yoga which is Unity with God, is the True Islam and the Supreme Universal World Faith that ought to be followed by all right-thinking men. Those who say otherwise are misguided Souls who don't realise what they are saying.

The fact is that Yoga is the True Faith which God Himself revealed to Mankind at the beginning of time and which the Gurus have faithfully transmitted ever since. And that is that. No amount of jealousy and envy on the part of self-appointed religious leaders can change that.

Indeed, such statements are themselves aberrations produced by the minds of fraudulent leaders who are afraid of losing their power over the people whom they keep under control by means of invented beliefs. These leaders are conspiring against the People and against Truth. What they don't know is that Truth itself is conspiring against them. Make no mistake. Mankind will soon rise up against such leaders and re-establish the Rule of Truth on Earth in accordance with Divine Will.

Those who ally themselves with Untruth are the Enemies of the True Faith and are guilty of spreading ignorance and misbelief. They do the work of evil against the Will of God. They may succeed for a while, but in the end they will have a price to pay for their deeds! As Scripture says, "man prospers for a while through Unrighteousness, but at last he perishes branch and root". Moreover, it is written: **"Those that disparage Lord Shiva or censure the propounders of His Perfect Knowledge are insane with delusion. They shall assuredly sink into the Ocean of Hell"** (Shiva Purana, Uma Samhita V, 7-8).

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 20

MAHA SHIVARATRI

(the Great Fast of Shiva)

QUESTION: Is fasting an important practice in Yoga?

ANSWER: The Sacred Scriptures of India are unique among the Scriptures of the World in that they clearly acknowledge the physical, religious and Spiritual importance of food. Thus in the Upanishads food is said to be everything and everything is said to be food. Indeed, the Supreme Being Himself is equated to food.

Food - the Ground of all things

Says Scripture: "That verily, from which beings are born, that by which when born they live, that into which upon dying they enter, That is the Supreme. For truly, indeed, beings here are born from food, when born they live by food, on dying they enter into food" (Taittiriya Up. 3, 1-2).

Indeed, the food man eats, the water he drinks, the air he breathes is food for his body; what he smells, tastes, sees, feels and hears is food for his mind; while God Himself and His Truth is food for his Soul. When man dies his body turns into food for other creatures and his Soul returns to God Who is the Ultimate Ground that gives nourishment and support to all living things.

Even in the Western World man's everyday experiences are instinctively likened to the process of eating and assimilating food, as becomes evident when we say that we "stomach", "chew on" or "digest" a situation or experience. However, precisely because food pervades all aspects of life, its importance tends to be overlooked.

For this reason, in Yoga, certain customs and ceremonies related to food are employed in order to enhance man's awareness of the religious and Spiritual meaning of food. Thus food is offered to guests, to the faithful who visit temples or attend religious ceremonies, at weddings, etc. Food is even offered to animals in the forest, to the Souls of deceased relatives and to the Gods. In India, in particular, every housewife

takes pride in her culinary skills, festivals often develop into real feasts, and temples feed thousands of destitute people.

For the same reason, abstaining from food is observed in a religious, Spiritual and even medical context. Overeating has long been identified as a cause of medical conditions by Indian physicians. Thus a traditional saying tells us that he who eats one meal a day is a righteous man (Yogi), he who eats two meals a day is a glutton (Bhogi) and he who eats three meals a day is a sick man (Rogi).

Fasting on New Moon's Eve

There are many very ancient, traditional forms of **Fasting (Upavasana)**. One of the most ancient ones, known as **Chandrayana**, is observed for a whole month. It consists in reducing the amount of food which totals fifteen mouthfuls on Full Moon, by one mouthful daily until New Moon when the fast becomes complete and then increasing it in the same manner from the day after New Moon to Full Moon. Complete abstinence from food is also observed for one, three, six, nine or twelve days according to each person's capacity and inclination.

Among the most auspicious times for fasting are the days of Full and New Moon as well as the eighth and the twenty-third of each month (counting from the first day after New Moon). **New Moon Day (Amavasya)** is the last day of the lunar month. The night before this, that is, **New Moon's Eve**, is the **Sacred Night of Shiva (Shiva Ratri)** which is also known as **The Fourteenth Day of Shiva (Shiva-Chaturdashi)** and **The Dark Night of Shiva (Shiva Kalaratri)**. Fasting during the day and night on this auspicious occasion is particularly meritorious, and is observed for the expiation of sins as well as for acquiring religious merit.

Thus it is written in the Shiva Purana: "O Sages! on the thirteenth day of the dark half of the month, one meal only shall be taken (by the devotee). But on the **fourteenth**, complete fast shall be observed. The **fourteenth** of the dark half is sure to bring about the propitiation of Lord Shiva".

Even greater merit is acquired by fasting on New Moon's Eve in the month of Magha (or Phalguna, depending on the calendar used). This is known as the **Great Night of Shiva** or **Maha Shivaratri** and is the most important holiday in Yoga. In India, this annual holiday may begin as early as a fortnight before New Moon, thus lasting for sixteen days in total, from the first day after Full Moon to the first day after New Moon. Says the Shiva Purana: "In the Month of Phalguna, in the Star Uttara-Phalguni, let the Great Festival of Shiva (Maha Utsava) commence".

Maha Shivaratri proper falls on the 14th of the dark fortnight in February or March, which is usually the 3rd New Moon's Eve (Amavasya) from the Winter Solstice (22 December) and a fortnight before the Festival of Holi.

The meaning of Shiva Ratri

Being held close to the beginning of Spring, Maha Shivaratri clearly represents a Spring Festival that celebrates the end of Winter and the arrival of Spring, that is, the beginning of new life. It is the time of the Year when days become visibly brighter and longer, and plants begin to grow new leaves. At this auspicious time, Shiva, the Creator and Lord of the Universe gives us the opportunity to cleanse ourselves of all negative influences of the past and make a new start in life. By purifying ourselves we also get closer to **Lord Shiva, the Supreme Principle of Purity and Goodness**, and become infused with His Divine Grace.

Spiritually speaking, therefore, Shiva Ratri symbolises the regeneration of the human Soul through **Unity with the Divine**. Amavasya or New Moon means literally, "together-dwelling". Astronomically speaking,

this refers to the dwelling together of the Sun and Moon (which on that day appear to be closest to, and facing, each other when seen from Earth).

On this point, a traditional legend relates the story of a young girl who lived in a mountain hamlet. Being the youngest of three sisters, she saw her elder siblings marry which stirred her curiosity as to who was going to be her future husband. Her mother, being a pious woman, one day replied, "Lord Shiva, my dear. He is the Husband of all Souls and so He will be your Husband, too".

The girl took her mother at her word and from then on paid daily visits to the local shrine, bringing food, flowers, incense and other offerings and anointing with oil the holy Shiva Image that was worshipped there by the people. When she reached the age of sixteen, on a New Moon's Eve, her tireless devotion was rewarded by a vision of Lord Shiva Who lovingly embraced her and carried her to His Celestial Abode.

She later descended down to Earth and built a Shiva Temple with her own hands on a mountain top, for the benefit of the people, before returning to her Divine Home. Since then she has been known as **Parvati**, the Mountain Maiden. Parvati, however, also means the Lofty One, or She who moves in the World Beyond (from Parvat, reach or move beyond). The girl therefore was without doubt an incarnation of the Great Goddess herself. To this day, the union of Parvati and Shiva is celebrated on New Moon Eve, when Sun and Moon or the Male and Female aspects of the Divine are said to dwell together. On Full Moon Day, Parvati herself smiles down on the World bestowing her blessings to the devotees.

In Spiritual or Yogic terms this Celestial Union refers to a state of Unity between the human Soul (symbolised by the **Moon, Ha**) and God (symbolised by the **Sun, Tha**). For this reason, Yoga is also known as **Hatha Yoga**, the Path of Unity between Man and God. Says the Skanda Purana: "Fasting on the fourteenth day of the dark half of the month is most excellent and conducive to the attainment of Oneness (Sayujya) with Shiva. The observance of Shiva Ratri is famed as the destroyer of all sins".

For this reason, Fasting is one of the Five Duties of Yoga. On a social level, fasting helps the believer to better understand the hardships experienced by the poor of the World. While on a Spiritual level, abstaining from food enhances the believer's self-discipline and Spiritual awareness. Learning to renounce food, even temporarily, helps us learn how to renounce the fruits of our actions and let go of the Ego that binds us to material existence. Freedom from our Ego and its material preoccupations enables us to come closer to God, the Ego being the main barrier that prevents us from experiencing Unity with the Supreme.

On this holy day, Spiritual thoughts and sentiments such as Universal goodwill and solidarity with Nature and Mankind, are especially cultivated and shared equally by all. Women and girls, in particular, pray for a good husband and marital happiness. In communities living outside India, Shiva Ratri is also an occasion for devotees to cultivate their cultural identity and strengthen their resolve to adhere to the **Eternal Law of the Universe (Sanatana Dharma)** as well as reaffirm their belief in the Spiritual Teachings of Yoga which are a unique means of attaining **Eternal Salvation**. In so doing, we set an example to the confused World of today and encourage it to resist the growing influences of materialism and false beliefs and return to the Right Path which is the Path ordained by God at the beginning of time.

The Eve of Shiva Ratri which lasts from dawn to dawn is a very sacred time which celebrates the Supreme Lord's Revelation of the Eternal Wisdom of Yoga at the beginning of Kali Yuga (5102 BC). The devotees pay a visit to the temples where religious services with chants and prayers are held every Prahara (three-hour watch) throughout the day and night until dawn. Devotional dances are sometimes also performed by the devotees in honour of Shiva Nataraja, Lord of the Cosmic Dance.

When a temple is not available, or in countries where Shiva Dharma (the Law of Shiva) is suppressed, devotees may gather together at home to pray and read from Scripture. Thus Shiva Ratri is the centre of Spiritual life in the community of devotees as well as fulfilling a social function.

The high point of Shiva Ratri is at midnight which is the 3rd watch of the night. In traditional Indian timekeeping, a day and night (24 hrs.) are divided into eight portions of three hours each, called Praharas or Yamas (watches). Midnight falls on the beginning of the third watch of the night. No food is permitted during Shiva Ratri with the exception of water, milk or in the case of small children, old or sick people, as well as pregnant women, some vegetables or fruit (no cereals or grains). While some devotees abstain from food for thirty-six hours, others begin their fast several days in advance.

At sunrise (that is, in the first watch of the day) on Shiva Ratri Day (Amavasya) a bath is taken in a river or temple bath. After one last visit to the temple, food is distributed to holy men (Sadhus) and the fast is ended with a festive meal which is shared by all the faithful (about the middle of the second watch of the day). Home-made sweets and fruit are distributed to relatives and friends and festive greetings are exchanged. It is customary among the followers of Shiva on this holy day to pay a visit to their Guru and present him with gifts.

The greatness of Shiva Ratri is praised in all the Scriptures. In the Shiva Purana, the Supreme Lord Himself declares: "No other rite is more beneficial to man than Shiva Ratri. By worshipping Me on Shiva Ratri the devotee attains the fruit that otherwise is only obtainable by constantly worshipping Me for a year. At this time, the virtue of devotion to Me increases like to the tide in the ocean at the rise of the Moon. Assuredly, for the performance of Shiva Ratri, I, Lord Shiva, Destroyer of all miseries, grant both worldly pleasures, Spiritual Salvation and all desired benefits".

The great Saint and poet, Utpaladeva of Kashmir exclaims: "Where the Sun, the Moon and all other lights set, may the indescribable Night of Shiva rise and reign supreme, spreading a radiance of its own!" (Shivastotravali IV, 22).

It is noteworthy that the Ancient Romans, Persians, Germans and Russians among many other nations on Earth also began their year in March or close to the beginning of Spring. In Britain, for example, New Year's Day was held on the 25th of March until as recently as 1752. The original Christians are similarly said to have celebrated the beginning of the Year on the 1st of March. This clearly demonstrates both the great antiquity and universality of this ancient holiday, as well as the unshaken determination with which Yogis have preserved their ancestral faith.

In India, in addition to this annual Spring Festival, Shiva Ratri is also observed monthly on every 14th, that is, just before New Moon Day (Amavasya). Other important holidays after Maha Shiva Ratri are **Rambha Tritiya**, **Tritiya Tithi (Teej)** and **Skanda Shashthi**. They are observed near New-Moon days in the months of Jyeshtha, Bhadrpada and Margashirsha, respectively. Other popular festivals are **Karttika Dipam**, held on Full Moon Day in the Month of Karttika and **Divali (Dipavali)**, which falls on the New Moon between the Months of Ashvina and Karttika.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 21

THE CENTRE OF THE WORLD

QUESTION: Does Yoga believe in a Spiritual Centre of the World?

ANSWER: All religions believe in a sacred place on Earth which has a special connection with the Divine. In most cases, this special place is identified with a mountain, hill, or rock. In Yoga, this honour is accorded to the Himalaya, the World's highest mountain, and in particular to **Mount Kailasa** of Tibet.

The World Mountain

The World is the Creation of the Supreme Being (Parama Shiva) and a Manifestation of His Infinite Majesty and Glory. Therefore, all things on Earth have a deeper meaning which needs to be adequately grasped if we want to properly understand the World.

Large terrestrial and celestial bodies such as Rivers, Seas, Mountains, the Sun, the Moon, in particular, possess a symbolic meaning of greatest importance to man. A Mountain is, by definition, an elevated ground that stands out through its height. In Yogic symbolism, Mountain (Parvata, That Which Reaches Beyond) signifies an elevated state of being, hence **Mount Meru**, **Mount Kailasa**, etc., where Higher Beings reside.

A Mountain exhibits a number of unique features that qualify it as an ideal Spiritual symbol. First, it suggests strength, firmness and stability which it appears to lend to its surroundings, for which reason it is often said to support the Earth.

Second, its valleys, forests and caves offer shelter from wind, rain, Sun and cold and in spring (or summer), when the snow or ice that covers its summit melts, it is a source of water in the form of lakes and running streams making it a indispensable well-spring of life.

Third, it extends from Earth to the Sky, thereby providing a connection between the Lower and Higher Planes of existence. Fourth, through its broad base and narrow top it suggests an upward motion symbolic of the Soul's journey of ascent from the Lower to the Higher.

And fifth, due to the fact that the Sun is often observed to rise from behind it as well as through its proximity to the Sky and brilliant, snow-capped peak, the Mountain is itself an abode of light and, therefore, of Divinity. These are some of the reasons for which mountains all over the World have been regarded as Seats of Divine Power since the beginning of human life on Earth.

It is noteworthy that each of the Seven Continents of Planet Earth has one Great Mountain that dominates the landscape around it. Thus there is Mont Blanc in Europe, Kilimanjaro in Africa, Carstensz Pyramid in Australia, McKinley in North America, Aconcagua in South America, Mount Vinson in Antarctica and **Mount Kailasa** in Asia, all of which range between approximately 5,000 and 7,000 meters above sea level.

Mount Kailasa (Kailash) itself is a true jewel among mountains, indeed, it is known by that name (Snow Jewel) to the locals. Rising to a height of over 6,000 meters, it is one of the highest mountains in the World. It is also one of the oldest, being older even than Himalaya itself. What distinguishes it from other mountains is that it is not an isolated elevation rising straight from a low-level surface but stands on the Tibetan Tableland, an immense high-altitude expanse of even land known as **The Roof of the World**, which stretches over the whole of Tibet and beyond.

The sacred rivers that spring from the hills around it and the vast lake at its foot - which is a unique sight of its own - make it a place of extraordinary physical beauty and Spiritual power. It is not surprising, therefore, that for millennia it has been a sacred place of pilgrimage to millions of Yogis, Hindus, Jains, Tibetan Bon-pos and Buddhists. Indeed, it has long been regarded as the Spiritual Centre of the World.

Says the Shiva Rahasya: "Thus they all went on their way and, after a long journey that seemed like seven days and seven nights, they could see the Holy Mountain shining from afar. The closer they came the brighter it shined. At the foot of the Mountain there lay a great Lake of pure water stretching far and wide. Its shores were lined with fine sand of gold-dust and precious gems. Rich grass and healing herbs grew in abundance on the green pasture all round upon which deer, wild horses and oxen grazed at will.

Swans and geese swam gracefully across its mirror-like face. The air was resonant with the sweet song of birds flying in and out of trees. Humming bees fed on the sweet-scented nectar of lotuses and other aquatic plants. Steps of blue stone led in and out of the cool water. Yogis and Yoginis (female Yogis), some clad in tree-bark or deerskin, others wearing nothing at all, novices with shaven heads and adepts wearing long matted hair, bathed therein or fetched water in vessels made of coco-nut shell, gourd or human skull. Others meditated sitting upon large rocks.

Children with smiling faces played on the banks and gathered flowers as offering to the Holy Gods. Blooming lotus-flowers shined like the stars whilst sun-lit, white clouds glided over the water like waves so that one could tell not whether the Sky had come down to Earth or the Earth had risen up to the Sky.

Indeed, the travellers thought that they had arrived in Heaven and were exceedingly amazed at that wonderful sight. They marvelled greatly, seeing the Holy Mount itself mirrored in the blue water: Heaven reflecting in the Mirror of the Earth. And they knew not which was the more wonderful to behold, the Radiant Mountain or its reflection in the Lake".

A similar description of this **Sacred Landscape (Shiva Kshetra)** is found in the Shiva Purana where the Holy Lake situated to the South of **Mount Kailasa** is called **Skandasaras**, otherwise known as **Lake Manasa**. Shiva's Own Manifestation as the **Eternal Youth (Sanatkumara)** is said to be seated on the northern bank of the Lake, surrounded by Yogis and Sages whom He instructs into the Highest Mysteries of the Universe.

Concerning this Holy Place, the Supreme Lord Himself declared: "At least once in a lifetime, My devotee shall visit the Sacred Places of the Holy Land of India. Among these, the most auspicious is **Holy Mount Kailasa**. It is set in the northernmost part of India, beyond the Abode of Snow (Himalaya). Being a reflection of **Mount Meru**, My Celestial Abode, it shines like a jewel among all Holy Places.

"It illumines the Nine Continents on Earth. From the hills round about it four mighty streams flow forth into the World like the Four Rivers of Life and a lake of holy water lies at its feet. The journey undertaken thereto is Yatra or Pilgrimage. Through the observance of this excellent practice one becomes worthy of the Highest Heaven. I Myself whisper the Secret Knowledge that leads to My Abode into the ear of those who with a pure Soul visit this Holiest of holy places".

The four holy rivers issuing from the slopes of **Mount Kailasa** are: the Brahmaputra flowing eastwards, the Karnali flowing southwards and into the Ganges, the Sutlej flowing westwards and the Indus flowing northwards. When viewed from above, the four holy rivers are said to resemble a **Swastika** or equal-armed cross the ends of which are bent at a right angle to indicate the circular movement of the Four World Ages.

When these are bent to the right, they indicate the right-turning revolution of the Wheel of Creation and Establishment of Divine Order on Earth. When bent to the left, they represent the opposite, left-turning counter-movement of the Wheel of Destruction and Dissolution. For this reason, in Indian ritual, right-turning (clock- or sunwise) movements symbolise the Right Order of Things by following which man returns to his true Self and attains Spiritual and material well-being.

The four arms of the Swastika also represent the Four States of Consciousness, Waking, Dreaming, Deep Sleep and Enlightenment issuing forth from the Central Source of Divine Illumination or the Supreme Enlightenment of Godhead. Furthermore, they represent the Four Streams of Divine Intelligence manifested as Wisdom, Detachment, Charity and Compassion which work together to uproot the Four Evils of the World: Ignorance, Greed, Envy and Hatred.

Indeed, **Swastika** or the **Seal of Divine Order** literally means Well-Being as well as Being Oneself (from Sva, self and As, to be). This refers to the Well-Being of the individual person as well as that of the whole World. It is not surprising, therefore, that the World's greatest faiths such as Yoga, Hinduism, Jainism and

Buddhism, have adopted the **Swastika** as a symbol of World Order as well as personal Salvation or Spiritual Fulfilment. Even the Christian Cross is just a modification of this Eternal Seal of Universal Law.

At the centre of the four holy Rivers of Life, at the very heart of this giant **Swastika**, there stands **Mount Kailasa** itself, the embodiment of Divine Order on Earth. For this reason, **Mount Kailasa** is regarded as the **Centre or Heart of the World** upon which the well-being of Mankind depends. According to an age-old prophecy, Mankind shall prosper so long as **Mount Kailasa** stands and receives the honour it deserves.

Even geographically speaking, the concept of **Mount Kailasa** as the **Centre of the World** is not altogether baseless. If we trace a straight line from the **North Pole** down to **Mount Kailasa** it will continue southwards all the way to **Sri Lanka**, dividing both India and the Eurasian Continent (the largest in the World) into two equal halves.

Moreover, in the same way as **Mount Kailasa** of North India is regarded as the Spiritual Centre of the World, the Central-Indian City of **Ujjain** also known as **Avantika (Capital of the Kingdom of Avanti)** was the political, cultural and geographical centre of the World being situated, like **Mount Kailasa**, midway between the Dark West and the Bright East. As such, it was known as Ozone to the Ancient Greeks and as Arin to the Arabs.

To this day, the North-South line passing through **Ujjain** and the terrestrial poles is still used in India as the basic meridian (or central longitude) for astronomical calculations. In consequence, it is not at all surprising that all mountains in the Holy Land of India are regarded as manifestations of **Mount Kailasa** and even temples are said to be images of the same.

What becomes evident is that **Mount Kailasa** must have provided the model for the sacred mountains - and temples - of the various religions of the World: from Sumerian ziggurats and Egyptian pyramids to Christian churches and Muslim mosques. Even the Bible speaks of an unidentified "Mountain of God" as well as four rivers that issue from the Garden of Eden (Paradise), etc. If we take into consideration that the Transhimalayan regions were warmer several millennia ago than they are today, **Mount Kailasa** clearly matches the biblical description of Paradise.

Thus it is written: "The enchanting summit of the Lord of Mountains (**Mount Kailasa**, also known as **Shiva Parvata** or **Mountain of God**), resplendent with all its various jewels, clad with many a tree and many a creeper, melodious with the song of many a bird, scented with the fragrance of all the seasons' flowers, most beautiful, fanned by soft, cool, and perfumed breezes, shadowed by the still shade of stately trees, etc." (Mahanirvana Tantra I 1-5).

The Gate of Heaven

Caves have been recognised as places of great Spiritual power from the beginning of human life on Earth and all traditions speak of caves where encounters with the Divine take place. Thus **Shri Ramana Maharshi**, the celebrated Sage of South India, relates the following in connection with a cave on Mount Arunachala: "I was wandering about aimlessly when I found at one place a big cave.

When I entered the cave, I saw a number of waterfalls, beautiful gardens, water tanks within those gardens, well-lit paths, fine lighting; everywhere there was most pleasing. As I went further and further I saw a Perfected Soul (Siddha Purusha) seated like **Lord Dakshina-Murti (Shiva as World Teacher)** under a tree on the banks of a water tank.

Around him, a number of Saints (Munis) were seated. They were asking something and he was replying to them. That place appeared very familiar to me" (Letters from Sri Ramanasramam, p. 370). The 10th century North-Indian Yoga Master, **Mahamaheshvara Abhinava Gupta**, is said to have entered the Bhairava Cave (near Magam, Kashmir) along with twelve hundred disciples, from where he ascended to

the Higher Planes. The 3rd century Persian Prophet, Mani, is also reported to have entered a cave where he remained for one year during which time he ascended to Heaven.

Similarly, the great Sage of Ancient Greece, Epimenides (6th century BC), is said to have fallen asleep in a cave as a young man and to have woken up 57 years later with the gift of prophecy. In the language of Spiritual symbolism, a cave situated near the summit of a mountain represents the highest state of consciousness by entering which man becomes Divine.

The act of entering a cave therefore symbolises the entrance into a Sacred, Divine Space that is not normally accessible to ordinary man. On account of the great silence and stillness prevalent in caves, the word cave also stands for the complete stillness and silence of the thought-free awareness experienced in the higher Spiritual States known to Yogis.

MYSTERIOUS SHAMBHALA

On the peak of **Mount Kailasa**, there lies **Shri Shivapura (the Glorious City of God)**, which is the Capital of the **Divine Kingdom of Shambhala**. It can be entered by means of a secret gate the exact location of which is known to the initiates into the mysteries of the **Divine Eternal Law (Shiva Dharma)** only. **Enlightened Yogis and Perfected Souls** can enter that sacred land at will.

Wondrous legends about this holy place abound all round the Himalaya region. Thus it is variously known as **Shambhala** from **Shambha-Laya** (the Abode of the Supreme Wellspring of Peace) and Shangri-La (Land of Sacredness and Peace). Ordinary mortals have so far been unable to locate this mythical kingdom. Those who have found it, have either remained there or are under oath not to divulge its secrets, for which reason it has been called **Agartha (the Ungraspable)**.

However, the key for unlocking this enduring mystery lies in the fact that this Sacred Land is situated on a different plane which is parallel to the physical plane called Earth. This may be illustrated by means of two persons, of which one is dreaming and the other is waking: they physically inhabit the same World, yet mentally one is in this World and the other in another World. This does not mean to say that Shambhala is just a dream, for certain dreams are indisputably true. It simply means that not every man can gain access to the higher (or Astral) planes, in the same way as not every man can enjoy the same dream.

This becomes clear if we carefully examine the Holy Scriptures. Thus the Shiva Rahasya states that Mount Kailasa is a reflection or image of Mount Meru (also known as Sumeru), the Mountain of Heaven which is God's Heavenly Abode. Strictly speaking, therefore, Shambhala is not Earth but **Paradise**.

This is why the Scriptures describe it as a place where Spring reigns for ever. Lotuses and beautifully scented creepers, trees and other plants are always in bloom. Flowers have stalks of gold and are studded with gems. The air is resonant with the song of birds and the humming of honey-bees echoed by Mount Meru itself. Even ferocious animals like tigers are of a peaceful disposition. It is inhabited by Celestial Nymphs (Apsaras), Saints, Gods and Immortals who know neither pain nor sorrow nor even death and who can travel over long distances by the power of their thought. The whole place is encircled by great walls of crystal, silver and gold. In short, a true **Garden of Paradise!**

At the same time, however, it is beyond dispute that the climate of the Tibetan Tableland was much milder in former times. Scientific studies have established that the entire area was much richer in vegetation and animal life up to about 1500 BC. It is possible, therefore, that unknown, ancient kingdoms were established in the region, no doubt under the inspiration and guidance of the Divine Kingdom of Shambhala itself.

Indeed, archaeological finds have revealed the presence of ancient European settlements in Western China (North of Tibet) as well as a bronze-age, non-Chinese kingdom to the East of Tibet. To the West, there was the Ancient Kingdom of Kashmir while in the South, the Kingdom of Varanasi was founded in ancient

times. What becomes evident, is that the legend of Shambhala is rooted in both material and Spiritual realities which are indisputable.

Unfortunately, the policy of the Chinese Communist Authorities who were responsible for the illegal invasion and occupation of Tibet, has been to destroy or otherwise conceal and suppress all evidence of non-Chinese presence in the area. The ongoing Communist (Atheist) occupation of Mount Kailasa itself and the brutal suppression of the local religion and culture do not bode well for the future of the World.

India, the Guardian of Religion on Earth, could have protected Tibet against the Chinese invasion of 1949-1951. Deplorably, this unique opportunity was missed by a weak, incompetent and irresponsible government. The only solution we have today, is to declare the entire area round Holy Mountain Kailas a World Heritage Site and place it under the authority of the relevant Spiritual leaders (Yogi, Hindu, Buddhist, etc.) that freedom of worship may be upheld in perpetuity.

We hereby urgently invite Spiritually-minded people from all countries in the World to join us in our campaign for Peace, Freedom and Justice. SAVE KAILASA TO SAVE THE WORLD!

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 22

DIVINE KINGSHIP

QUESTION: Should countries be ruled by elected presidents or by hereditary rulers such as kings?

ANSWER: The word used in Yoga to designate a Ruler is **Rajah**. Although **Rajah** can mean any leader in charge of governing a country, it is translated as **King** due to the fact that this is the English word that normally suggests Governance as a divinely ordained institution, which is the sense and meaning generally intended in Yoga.

The Sanskrit word **Rajah** is one of the oldest known to man. Like a great tree, its ancient roots reach deep into prehistoric times while its many branches stretch out from Asia to the Western shores of Europe. Related words are found in many Western tongues: French Roi, Spanish Rey, Romanian Rege, English Regent.

Etymologically speaking, **Rajah** is allied to the verbal roots **Raksh**, to protect, hence Latin **Rex**, and **Rak/Rag**, to stretch out, make straight, make right, rule, hence English **Right**. It is therefore rightly associated with **Protection, Righteousness, Spiritual Power** and **Divine Rule**. In consequence, it is not surprising that **Kingship (Rajatva)** has a special significance in Yoga. This is what the Holy Scriptures of India have to say on this matter:

**"God created the King for the protection of all.
A King is the embodiment of the Guardian Gods.
He surpasses all creatures in brilliance. Even an
infant King must not be looked upon as a mere
mortal. For he is a Great Deity in human form."
- Manu Smriti VII 3 -8**

Indeed, the Yogic concept of **Divine Kingship**, that is to say, the authority whereby a country is ruled in harmony with the **Supreme Principle of Goodness (God)**, has until recently been universally accepted by the thinking men of East and West as the **ideal form of governance**.

The notion that Monarchy (rule by one divinely guided person) is somehow inferior to Democracy (rule by common, anti-Spiritual people) is a relatively new development in the history of human thought. Ancient man recognised the fact that some people possess greater intelligence, knowledge and experience - and therefore are better suited to govern a country - than others are.

Even more so, when the Ruler appears to have some kind of close contact to a Higher Intelligence (or Divine Spirit) that endows him with seemingly superhuman abilities, and when he is, literally, born and bred to that task. Indeed, it was on this basis that the **Kings** of the Ancient World were appointed to rule over their people, and history offers many examples of great **Kings** who on account of their natural Spirituality, which was supported and enhanced by long military, political and Spiritual training, have earned the gratitude and admiration of countless successive generations.

The reason why most monarchies were in recent times replaced by so-called democracies is that due to the Spiritual degeneration of mankind many Kings in the past came to power not by the Will of God but by political and military means. Consequently, these "Kings" (1) were either incapable or unwilling to follow divine guidance and (2) abused their powers in ways that gave rise to the erroneous belief that only democracy can somehow guarantee that the interests of the people are served as intended by them.

Is Democracy better than Monarchy?

There are a number of problems with democracy, of which we shall enumerate just a few. The reader is invited to form his own arguments for or against our findings and decide for himself:

1. Democracy means rule by majority. This can only work on the supposition that majority view is always the right view. But the fact is that the truth or falseness of a view has nothing to do with the number of people subscribing to it. In practice, majority view is often logically and factually wrong.

The main reason for this is that people in general do not have sufficient political, economic or social training to understand and foresee all the ramifications (both short-term and long-term) of their choice when electing a Government into office and therefore often elect the wrong person or policy. Moreover, the democratic election system whereby politicians - and their programmes - are elected in and out of office every few years, results in politicians taking short-term views of their policies, to the detriment of systematic long-term planning.

Thus, in Western democracies, politicians become primarily concerned with offering superficial, temporary solutions to the problems that are of concern to the electorate who in turn have neither the specialised expertise nor the time nor, indeed, the inclination, to analyse the policies they have voted for or which are being designed and implemented on their behalf.

2. Majority view is largely formed by the media. But the majority has no control over the media. The media are controlled by obscure individuals and shadowy organisations. This makes it easy for a powerful minority to manipulate the majority.

Thus on January 26 2005, the founder of the American news network CNN, Ted Turner, acknowledged the misuse of the media as a political propaganda tool and the problems this poses for democracy. He even went so far as to compare sections of US media to the propaganda machine of Nazi Germany, describing this as one of the "five biggest problems we face in America". In Britain, the BBC was likewise indicted as biased in an official report by the BSC (Broadcasting Standards Commission).

The fact is that, in democracies as in dictatorships, even language is being distorted and used as a propaganda instrument of mass deception and manipulation. For example, in addition to their irrational opposition to the time-honoured principle of Kingship, democracies often succumb to radical, left-wing, liberalist ideologies which would have us believe that governments must be "secular". Now in the English

language, secular means atheistic or godless. Why then should a country, most of whose citizens believe in God, be ruled by non-believers or even anti-religious elements?

3. In practice, democracy does not always give people the freedom and equality it is supposed to guarantee: people often have the freedom to say what they want only so long as they do not contradict official, media-dictated consensus opinion. A party can be excluded from the political process by other parties through their refusal to co-operate with it.

Indeed, political or religious groups holding views that differ from or oppose the official line are often outlawed, deprived of public funding, ridiculed in the media or otherwise marginalised, undermined and suppressed. This makes it hard or impossible for large sections of the population to find a voice or wield any degree of power. Thus many people are denied the opportunity to make a contribution to national and international politics. This is a blatant contradiction of democratic principles which demand that power belong to all the people and not to part of the people. In short, democracy is often just a thinly veiled form of mass deception.

On strict logic, it makes no difference what system of governance we employ, so long as it guarantees the Spiritual and material good of the people. In practice, however, monarchies such as Britain, Japan and Sweden have in the past proved to be far more efficient in serving the interests of their people than many a democratic government. By contrast, supposedly democratic governments such as that of modern India, have often notoriously failed to adequately promote the much needed material and Spiritual progress of their people.

It is not mere coincidence that, even today, when only a handful of monarchies remain in power, a recent study places five monarchies (Norway, Luxembourg, Sweden, Denmark and Spain) among the ten countries with the highest living standards in the World - out of a total 111 countries. By contrast, most of the World's democracies (including USA) are rated lower than the above monarchies, France and Germany being on places 25 and 26, respectively. Predictably, Communist countries - the most anti-monarchist of the lot - are rated among the lowest on the list. (The Economist, "The World in 2005")

The failure of Democracy

In their obsessive attempt to abolish their own history and reinvent themselves, democratic nations all over the World have exhibited a curious tendency to become bogged down in all manner of political, cultural and social experiments which by and large have failed to produce the expected results. Having lost their link to the Divine, large sections of Humanity are now in danger of losing their human touch.

Millions of unfortunate Souls are suffering the nefarious effects of anti-Spiritual excrescences such as rampant capitalism (rule by big business), communism (atheist state rule) and religious fundamentalism (rule by self-appointed religious authorities), the proliferation of which could have been inhibited by the establishment of Spiritually-inspired monarchies based on time-honoured Yogic principles.

It is beyond dispute that crime, violence, corruption, terrorism, mental disorder and disease are on the rise in all of the World's democracies.

The reasons for this are not hard to find. Firstly, it is important to understand that most democracies in the World were established after the Second World War, from the 1950s onwards. Secondly, the problem is that both the means whereby democracies were established and the motives behind their establishment were flawed.

Most democracies were sponsored by financial powers - led by US banks - and based on money-centered economies. The reasoning behind this was that such economies would generate enough income to keep

everybody happy and quiet. What was not realised was that ever-growing Western economies forced non-Western nations to adopt lifestyles and means of production to suit Western needs.

"Undeveloped" nations were forced to give up their traditional self-sufficient existence and put all their energy and resources into producing goods required by the developed World. The global tourism, consumer and arms industries further contributed to the irreparable damage inflicted on traditional societies everywhere.

Meanwhile, Western nations were growing wealthier but not any happier. Because the basic plan of the democratic utopia was drawn on materialistic patterns of thought that completely ignored man's most fundamental psychological and Spiritual needs, it has resulted in unstable and volatile societies all over the World. Today, human civilisation is a shaky, profoundly unsound makeshift structure that can collapse any time.

While conflicts in the past remained largely local, modern conflicts threaten to engulf the whole World in chaos, anarchy and destruction. "Bread and games" or food and entertainment, was the mantra of Ancient Rome. As we know, the Roman Empire didn't last for ever. Nor can its successor, the modern Western Empire, reasonably expect to last any longer. Ultimately, money cannot save the World. What it can do, when in the wrong hands, is send Humanity even faster to its grave. This is precisely what is happening now.

The dangers of Secularism

Secularism, in particular, which is an offshoot of Democratism, has done incalculable damage to World stability and peace. For example, secularist democracies have patently failed to prevent the rise of materialism and its attendant environmental and moral decline. Although Secularism was expressly introduced as a means of combating the excesses of religious extremism within a nation, it has in fact rendered secular democracies vulnerable to infiltration and subversion by foreign religious extremists who view it as their duty to impose their own beliefs on the "unbelieving" host country.

The disillusionment of democratic nations with their own governments is such that millions take to all kinds of aberrant behaviour from compulsive consumerism and drug or alcohol abuse to joining bogus cults and "religions" some of which actively promote violence against everybody else.

For example, some of the largest public demonstrations ever held in Western "democracies" were in support of the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein and the terrorist leader Osama bin Laden. In 2003, there were more supporters of Saddam Hussein on the streets of Western capitals than in Baghdad!

When a large part of the population is so ignorant, confused and frustrated as to side up with terrorists and dictators against its own government, this is unmistakable proof that Democracy doesn't work.

As reported in the national papers, secret underground networks have been established in Britain to protect people who choose to leave mainstream religions (in this case, Islam). Such underground support groups have been forced to "adopt a method of operation normally associated with dictatorships, not democracies", writes the Times (February 5, 2005). This is a remarkable admission that democracy is not quite so different from dictatorship, after all.

Thus in less than a century, the transition from Monarchism to Secularist Democratism has created two of the greatest problems Mankind has ever seen: Environmental Disasters and Religious Terrorism.

To sum up, the obsessive preoccupation of the Modern World with Western-style democracy stems from a **double misunderstanding**. The first misunderstanding is the notion that democracy gives power to the people: it does no such thing; democratic countries are in fact ruled by an ideologically or financially

committed elite; once it has been elected (with the help of financial interests) one political party will largely determine how the country is ruled.

Moreover, why support several parties (with the tax-payers' money) when only one party will be elected for government anyhow? Take the election system in the USA. About 50 per cent of the electorate vote for the Democrats while the other 50 per cent vote for the Republicans. If any of the two parties wins, say, 51 per cent of the total vote, this will entitle its supporters to rule the country for four years, forcing 49 per cent of the nation to take a back seat and allow the others to do practically anything they wish!

The fact is that "majority" means "the greater number". While 51 out of 100 may indeed be greater than 49 in purely mathematical terms, in real life 51 per cent means "barely over half". For example, a person who owns 51 pounds or dollars can hardly be said to be richer than one who owns only 49; an army of 51 soldiers can hardly be considered to be numerically stronger than one of 49, etc. In consequence, "majority" should mean at least 60 or, even better, 75 per cent. By contrast, a 51 to 49 situation means roughly half for and half against, that is, insufficient to decide either way and should not be allowed to masquerade as "majority".

In theory, the electoral system is supposed to ensure that the country is ruled in accord with the wishes of the people. In practice, however, not every party has the financial means to get its message across to enough people or to present its views in a sufficiently attractive way as to stand a chance. To challenge the ruling party, other parties must either (a) possess greater financial resources than the ruling party or (b) resort to physical force. As most people detest violence, it is clear that the wealthiest political group or the money-men behind it, will win. While in a Monarchy all people know who the King is and what he stands for, in a Democracy nobody knows who is behind an elected party, who are its financial supporters or what its true motives are. This once again demonstrates the fallacy of Western Democratism and its aberrations.

The second misunderstanding is the irrational belief that Monarchy means that the country is ruled by one single person to the complete exclusion of everybody else. This is supposed to lead to dictatorship, despotism and tyranny. This view ignores the fact that monarchies have been established for the good of all. "**God created Kingship for the protection of all**", says Scripture.

Moreover, while a monarch may well consult his people on a particular issue, democratic governments often don't even bother to hold referendums but impose their agenda on everyone without any kind of consultation. The only options people are left with in these circumstances are either to instigate a bloody revolution (which very few people are prepared to even contemplate) or patiently wait till the next elections - by which time the issue is either forgotten or overshadowed by new ones, or due to lack of plausible alternatives, the old, despised government is reluctantly re-elected for another few years and so on.

Finally, if elected presidents are supposed to be more democratic (or equalitarian) than hereditary monarchs, why do they live in palaces or palace-like mansions like the White House?

Raja-Dharma

Having demonstrated that, in reality, democracy is just an illusion, we shall now see whether monarchy would be a better system.

The Holy Scriptures of India detail the qualities, qualifications and duties a **King** must fulfil in order to carry out his function as righteous leader. Although there are small variations between different Scriptures, a list of thirty-six such points may be regarded as universally valid.

Thus a **King** would have to be chosen by an Assembly of Holy Sages (Wise Men) and enthroned in accord with Scriptural injunctions. The King must be of handsome and auspicious features, strong, able and free from any defects in body and in mind. His foremost duty shall be to establish Righteousness on Earth. He

shall be a follower of Truth. He shall have no dealings with the people of Untruth. Ever remembering that God is the True Sovereign he shall be a tireless Defender of Divine Law (Dharma).

The King must favour peace above war. He shall not start a war without just cause. But if assailed by the enemy, he shall be fearless in defending himself and his realm. He shall be skilled in the use of the thirty-six kinds of weapons and in tactics of war. He shall enter the battlefield like an elephant entering a lotus pond. He shall be brave in battle, magnanimous in victory and unbowed in defeat (compare this with the proverbial cowardice of democratic presidents and prime ministers!).

Furthermore, the King must maintain good relations with neighbouring kings and protect all allied kings and their people. He shall be like a father and an elder brother unto his subjects. He shall rule with courage, humility and wisdom. He shall apportion punishment and reward after befittingly enquiring into the matter. He shall always be well-informed in regard to the character, behaviour and intentions of his subjects. He shall be aware that excessive generosity can corrupt and too much censure can give rise to resentment.

The King shall be fair and kind to his Queen, wives and female attendants. He shall be courteous and just to ministers and menservants alike. He shall be devoted to the protection and welfare of all his subjects. He shall work for the prosperity of his people, his family and his own person through righteous means. He shall surround himself with trustworthy informers and advisers. He shall himself mingle among the people in disguise in the search for truth. (In India, kings are historically known to have toured the country to uncover any misdemeanour of ministers and other state servants, such as imposing excessive taxes on the people, etc. Thus common people were given a real opportunity to make their grievances known directly to the Sovereign.)

The King shall be moderate in eating, physical exercise and sexual enjoyment. He shall be ever watchful and awake even in sleep. He shall practise self-control and abstain from unnecessary thoughts, words and deeds. He shall not divulge secrets of state. He shall be a speaker of truth in a gentle and clear voice. He shall be a dedicated follower of Shiva, an accomplished practiser of Yoga and a master of the Eight Yogic Powers (Ashtasiddhi).

The King shall receive in payment for his service to the nation neither more nor less than the sixth part of the land's produce. He shall build holy temples, contemplation halls and schools as well as water tanks, wells, parks and shelters, sanctuaries for the poor and the oppressed and abodes of healing for those of ill health. He shall encourage Spiritual study and debate and take part therein so often as his royal duties permit. Self-sacrifice for the good of the people shall be regarded by him as the highest goal. He shall give his daughters in marriage to the best among men and procure virtuous wives for his sons. At the end of his reign on Earth the King shall entrust his kingship unto his first-born son or some other suitable successor.

The **Wise King** must rule the country according to the **Four Means** of (1) Peaceful Persuasion, (2) Enticement, (3) Sowing Dissension and (4) Punishment. Firstly, he shall persuade his opponents by peaceful means such as reasoned argumentation, the invocation of Divine Eternal Law (Sanatana Dharma), and so forth. Secondly, if he be unable to achieve the desired end, he should bestow gifts of land, gold, or give his offspring in marriage to those powerful rulers with whom he wishes to make peace for the good of the people. Thirdly, if that were to be in vain, he should sow dissension among his foes that they may be divided by discord and become easier to conquer. And fourthly, if that also fail, he shall impose his will by means of force. He shall diligently apply these four means in his dealings with powerful men, be they strangers or of his own race, ever seeking to do good for his people.

For restraining the evil-doers in his own land the King is advised to employ the **Six Means**, each according to the crime and the perpetrator of the crime: (1) verbal admonition, (2) imposition of a fine, (3) inflicting corporal punishment, (4) bounding in fetters (i.e., imprisonment or enslavement), (5) banishing and in the case of very serious crimes, (6) death.

Thus the King, ever remembering that **God is the True Sovereign**, shall keep his people on the Road of Righteousness according to Dharma (Divine Law). He shall restrain the thieves, the robbers, the murderers, the oppressors of the upright, and the godless who seek to corrupt the righteous. The King who restrains not the sinners shall take their sins upon himself. Therefore the King shall ever exert himself to punish the wrongdoers and reward the virtuous. Evil shall be banished by him like weeds and Righteousness cultivated like flowers and fruit-bearing trees. In consequence, towards such a King the hearts of the people will turn like rivers towards the Sea. (See Skanda Purana, Shiva Rahasya, etc.)

We must remember at this point that Kingship was traditionally regarded as a divinely-established institution that was taken very seriously by the ancients. A Monarch could not act on his whims but according to the strict rules of **Raja-Dharma (Code of Royal Conduct)**.

In addition to the time-honoured rules of **Raja-Dharma**, a King would have to give due consideration to the advice of his Council of Ministers, which consists of incorruptible, trustworthy, honest and loyal men who are skilled in military and political matters and who have been tried. Corrupt rulers who transgressed the principles of **Raja-Dharma** would be eliminated either by popular uprising or on the orders of the Council of the Wise (Rishi Mandala). Thus the Skanda Purana declares that tyrants be thrown into a dark well.

The notion that Kings exploited the people, turns out to be the product of left-wing imagination which has been used as a propaganda tool to deny and cover up the criminal actions of Communist Rulers like Lenin, Stalin, Mao Zedong, Indira Gandhi and Pol Pot. Until the abolition of Monarchy by the left-wing (Congress) government of India half a century ago, Indian Kings were still observing the ancient custom of **Tula-Dana** or **Purusha-Dana**. This consisted in weighing their own person in gold and silver and then donating the cash equivalent to the poor. Under the ancient system, vast amounts of money were also donated to temples which had the duty to carry out various forms of social work for the benefit of those in need of help or welfare.

What becomes evident, is that far from being self-seeking despots and dictators, the **Kings** of the Ancient World, in particular in the Holy Land of India, were benevolent rulers who were in many ways superior to their modern-day "democratic" counterparts who often are more interested in amassing power and wealth than in anything else. In consequence, it is not surprising that the greatest men of Ancient Greece - the country credited with the introduction of democracy - such as Socrates and Plato, favoured governance by a **Wise King ("Philosopher King")** over all other systems.

It is our firm conviction, therefore, that only leaders who function as part of a time-honoured, Spiritually-inspired tradition can have a unifying, stabilising and elevating effect on a nation and the course she follows in history.

The fact is that the Supreme God of Ancient Greece was called "King of the Gods"; the Bible (New Testament) similarly speaks of the "Kingdom of God"; it describes Jesus Christ as "King of Israel" (indeed, Khristos or Christ means "King") ; while, in the Old testament, God Himself declares: "I have set the King on Zion, My Holy Hill". The Quran also says that those who go to Heaven will live in the presence of a "Great King". In consequence, the Yogic teaching of Divine Kingship must be admitted to be in agreement with the Scriptures of the World and Kingship clearly represents a divinely ordained institution.

Indeed, the DIVINE KING is a Servant of the People and a Servant of God. His aim is not to divide and rule but, in true Yogic fashion, to Unite and Serve. He represents both a nation's link to the sacred past and her guiding light towards a glorious future.

Among India's many wise and valiant **Kings** who are still remembered today, are: **Lord Rama, Emperor Ashoka, King Vikramaditya** and **Shivaji Maharaj**. Last but not least, **Lord Buddha himself** was a Royal Prince by birth.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 23

MOMENTARINESS

QUESTION: Does Yoga believe in the momentariness of things?

ANSWER: Momentariness or the material, objective World's quality of lasting just one moment, is a well-known Yogic teaching various forms of which have passed into Ancient Hindu, Buddhist and even modern scientific thought.

This teaching is based on the fact that every perception can be analysed into a series of moments or **Kshana** and therefore may be described as momentary (**Kshanika**). For this reason, the teaching that concerns itself with this fact, is known as **Kshanikavada (Doctrine of Momentariness)**.

To begin with, we must define what is meant by **perception** or **experience**. **Experience** is an act of awareness whereby we become aware of, or consciously register, something such as a thought, emotion or sense perception. While **experience** is a more general term for this phenomenon, **perception** often refers to the registration of a specific sensory stimulus such as sound, feel, colour, flavour and scent or a combination of these.

Every experience presupposes a **subject** and an **object**. The **subject** is the underlying substratum of every experience. It is that which experiences, or is aware of, a thing. And the **object** is that which is experienced by the conscious subject as being within the latter's sphere of experience or awareness.

In Yogic terminology, the subject is called **pramata** (or **pramatri**, that which perceives or experiences) and the object is called **prameya** (that which is perceived or experienced). The subject's perception or awareness of the object is called **pramiti** (that which is perceived or known in relation to the perceived object).

It is well to understand at this point that the **object** and our **awareness** thereof are two related yet distinct elements of experience like the two sides of a coin, for example. While the object is perceived as being located "out there", our awareness or knowledge of it clearly lies within us. Even when we close our eyes and visualise or dream a particular object, it is perceived as projected on to the mental screen before us, whereas our emotional and intellectual experience of the object is felt as lying deep within us.

Thus the experience, awareness or perception of an object is experienced as being closer to our heart or innermost being, than the object itself. While object and experience are often confused with each other in the hustle and bustle of everyday life, a little analytical thinking will show that they are two distinct elements or phases in the process of knowledge.

The Fundamentals of Perception

Armed with this knowledge, we may now investigate the nature of what we call experience so that we better understand both ourselves and the World "out there". Suppose I am looking at a flower which I see clearly before me and form in my mind the concept, "I see a flower". According to what has been said before, the flower is the **object-element** or objective factor of my experience, technically called **prameya**.

The **object** has two aspects: (1) the flower itself, growing in the garden, which is the **external physical object** on one hand, and (2) the **mental image** or **impression** I form of it in my mind, on the other hand.

NOTE: As direct perception of any object, without the intermediacy of the senses, is ordinarily impossible, the object we are talking about is nothing but this **mental image**.

The faculties of perception, which convey the object's properties (sound, touch, colour, taste and smell) to the mind; the mind itself which turns its attention to, selects and builds these up into an image; the ego or personality whereby I relate to this image as "mine"; and the intellect whereby I compare the image of this flower to that of others seen in the past, and whereby moreover I form a judgement as to whether I should carry on looking at this particular flower or turn my attention to other things; in short, what may be generally termed mind and its cognitive processes, is the **means (pramana)** or **inner instrument (antar karana)** whereby I come into possession of knowledge about the **object**.

The **awareness** or **knowledge** of the perceived object as an effect (pramana-phala) of the above described cognitive processes is the **pramiti** or what I know about the object.

I myself, as the **conscious entity** holding this awareness of the object within myself, am the **subject-element (pramata)** of any perception.

Thus every act of perception may be analysed into four fundamental factors:

1. The **Subject** or perceiving entity (**Pramata**).
2. The **Awareness** or **Knowledge** of a perceived object (**Pramiti**).
3. The **Means** of perception (**Pramana**).
4. The **Object** of perception (**Prameya**).

The Momentariness of Perception

Although, superficially speaking, the object may be said to be a permanent, simple and solid thing, a little reflection will show that this is not so. To begin with, the object consists of the five sense perceptions (sound, touch, colour, taste and smell). For we cannot say anything about an object other than the fact that it makes a particular **sound** when it is moved or comes into contact with other things, it **feels** in a particular way when we handle it, it exhibits a particular size, shape and **colour** when we gaze at it, etc. Psychologically speaking, the object is not simple but composite or complex, consisting of the just mentioned sensory properties.

Moreover, each of the component perceptions turns out to consist of innumerable, minute **points or units of perception** appearing and disappearing before our faculties of sight, smell, etc., at such a speed as to give the impression of permanence in much the same way as an electrical bulb emits rays of light, or a candle emits a series of flames that give the appearance of permanent luminosity.

Just as a wave that first rises from the sea, endures for a moment and finally subsides, so also every momentary **unit of perception** has three phases: (1) **origination (utpatti)**, (2) **persistence (stithi)** and (3) **subsidence (samhrti)** or **merging back (laya)** into its original ground.

In the same way as each flame comes into being and vanishes in quick succession according as each particle of fuel is being lit by the previous one and consumed, so also each mental image of my flower is created in quick bursts or pulses by the mind.

This is not only observable as a fact of experience (with a little training) but is also a **logical necessity**. For, were the image of the object not recreated every moment afresh, we could hardly speak of an experience (any experience) as taking place in the present.

Were the image to last any longer than a very brief moment, it would lose its freshness and its direct relation to the physical object and become like a still painting or photograph. In other words, the mental

image or impression would be out of synchrony with the physical object. That this is not the case, we know from the fact that as soon as a breeze starts, the flower slightly changes its position in space, a change that is immediately reflected in our mental image of the moving object.

The objective image, therefore, which we form in our mind as a replica of the external object, must be admitted to be not permanent but momentary.

The external object

It will be useful at this point to say a few words regarding the nature of the physical objects themselves. A physical object - as opposed to an inwardly perceived mental image - is what we experience as lying outside our physical body. For this reason, it is called **external object (bahyartha)**.

Concerning external objects, even modern Science admits that they consist of component elements such as cells, molecules, atoms and subatomic energy particles none of which are permanent, so the objects, too, are impermanent.

Moreover, since according to Western Science, physical objects are made up of tiny parts which are divisible into progressively tinier parts, we logically arrive at substances that are ultimately so subtle as to be practically indistinguishable from the mind that is perceiving or conceiving them.

This means that, in the final analysis, no essential difference can be established between physical objects and the mind which perceives them.

Even if such objects existed independently of the mind, our conscious perception of them would still be required in order for practical life to be possible. In practice, therefore, we must admit that the existence of physical objects depends on our perceiving them. In different terms, it may be said that the external, physical object (bahyartha) is in fact a creation of consciousness, as will be explained later.

Meanwhile, what is essential to understand is that we cannot, in ordinary experience, directly perceive any external object but only a **momentary image** thereof (every perception taking place through the medium of our faculties of perception which can provide us with nothing more than an image made of the five sensory elements, sound, touch, etc.).

Even if we were able, by means of a magnifying implement such as a microscope, to see an atom or some other tiny component of a physical object, our perception thereof would still consist of nothing but the above mentioned sensory element, in this case, colour. All we could say, in such a case, would be: "I see certain shapes, forms, etc., which are modifications of colour which are the product of my faculty of sight".

As already explained, all visual perceptions are momentary. And because all our mental processes such as perceiving, thinking or feeling are based on such momentary images, they also must be and, indeed, are momentary.

Permanent Spirit vs. impermanent Matter

It is important to understand at this point that the momentariness of objective reality does not mean that "nothing is permanent" in an absolute sense. Such a position would lead to nihilism, anarchy and chaos.

Although such a negative stance has been adopted by certain philosophical schools in the past, it is a patent fact that Life and the Universe are based on enduring order and harmony. This is only natural, if we consider that Spirit or Consciousness which is the underlying ground of all things, is an Eternal Reality. In

consequence, the ancient saying, "**everything is impermanent (sarvam anityam)**" applies to the objects of the World and experiences based on them only, and not to the conscious Soul himself.

Nor must we believe that the World of objects is somehow illusory or unreal just because it is made of moments of perception. Such a belief would lead to the same kind of negative attitude towards the World as the belief that nothing is permanent.

The World is a momentary, yet real, creation of Consciousness. The Teachings of Yoga, therefore are positive and realistic. They may accurately be described as **Realistic Idealism**. Yoga is Idealistic because it teaches that the World is an "Idea", that is, a creation of Consciousness. And it is Realistic, because it teaches that the World is real and not a mere illusion.

To sum up, although the objects of the World are impermanent (or momentary), the Supreme Being or Universal Soul is both Permanent and Eternal. The personal, embodied Soul is equally permanent though not eternal in his limited, human form. He becomes Eternal, properly speaking, in the final stages of **Enlightenment (Nirvana)**, when he becomes One with the Supreme, the Changeless, the Uncreated, the Unborn **Eternal Principle (Amarta Dhatu)**.

What becomes evident is that the only thing that is not permanent is the **object**. The **subject**, on the other hand, which is the more important of the two, is **Permanent**. This is why man instinctively gives more importance to himself than to external things. All man needs to do is become clear as to his true identity.

This is why it has been said, "All living creatures are aware of subject and object. However, Yogis alone know the true relation of the two" (Vijnana-Bhairava Tantra 106).

This, therefore, is the purpose of Yoga: to awaken in man a higher knowledge of himself. The answer to the age-old question, "**who am I?**" is this: the conscious entity who is aware of object, means of knowledge, knowledge of the object and their momentariness (kshanikatva) or impermanence (anityata) as opposed to his own changelessness and permanence, is the **Soul**, who is the true man.

Soul or Spirit has two aspects: one personal or human, and one Universal or Divine. The human Soul is a limited subject, whereas the Universal Soul is Limitless. The Universal Soul (God) is the Supreme Subject Who is aware of and experiences all other things.

As the South Indian Yogi and poet, Maheshvarananda said: "The Yogi wears - like a rosary of variegated gems - the manifold succession of (the various states) waking, dreaming, deep sleep and Awakening, strung upon the single thread of Self-awareness" (Maharthamanjari 61). Self-awareness is the key to a higher experience of life.

In the final analysis, therefore, the Soul or the Consciousness-element of the experience alone qualifies as Subject while everything else, from and including the intellect or thinking faculty down to what is perceived by means of the senses and processed by the mind is, by virtue of its being objectively perceived, called object.

This object is called material, because it consists of **Material Energy** which is a condensed, "dormant" form of consciousness as opposed to the free, radiant, awake and self-aware consciousness of the Soul proper.

In the same way as rising and subsiding waves require the permanent background of the sea, or a burning flame requires the permanence of the wick and fuel in an oil-lamp, so also momentary perceptions require the permanence of a perceiving subject.

The perceiving subject or conscious Soul, therefore, is the background against which all states, experiences and perceived objects constantly come and go like clouds in the sky and ripples in the sea.

The fact is that the perception of a sense datum vanishes the moment it is apprehended, like a snowflake held in the hand. However, it does not disappear entirely without a trace, but it leaves an impression upon the permanent Soul.

This impression is combined by the conscious Soul with those of previous perceptions and formed into a coherent whole, thereby giving rise to the appearance of permanence, coherence and meaningfulness. Without the permanent Soul, no such experience would be possible. All we could see would be a series of momentary, unrelated and unintelligible pieces of perception or experience.

Moreover, in the same way as every experience requires a permanent, changeless and still principle (the conscious Soul) in order for the awareness of momentariness, movement or change in the object or objects to arise, it also requires a **permanent substance** out of which the momentary components of experience arise and to which they return once they have been experienced or consciously registered.

This **permanent substance or material** is the Soul's own material, objective aspect called **Matter** or **Material Energy (Prakarti or Pradhana)**. This is why it has been said: "From Self, Matter flows forth". Material Energy is that aspect of the Soul which provides the material of our experiences.

From that permanent material, the momentary factors of experience (intellect, ego, mind, senses and sense objects) arise and to that they all return, Material Energy being both their source and place of rest.

From Impermanence to Eternity

It will be remembered that the momentariness of the object of experience involves a series or sequence of mental images quickly following one after the other as to give the appearance of permanence in the object.

Now the object is reflected on the mirror-like light of the Soul like a dark shadow on a snow-covered mountain. Suppose there is a sequence of shadows cast by passing clouds on the snow-white mountain. If instead of observing the passing shadows the observer were to focus his gaze on the mountain itself, he would then be able to see it in all its white, sunlit brilliance in the intervals between the end of one shadow and the beginning of the next.

Similarly, by concentrating his attention on the point between the subsiding of one image or object and the coming into being of the next, that is to say, on the brief breaks or gaps in the rapid flux of objective awareness or perception, a trained Yogi can catch a glimpse of the light of the Soul and recognise himself as that. Penetrating even further, the Soul recognises himself as one with the Universal Self.

NOTE: The above is a very important point to understand because it demonstrates why, in Yoga, the existence of both Soul and God is not a matter of belief or conjecture but of direct experience.

References to this teaching are found in some of the earliest Yogic texts such as the **Yoga Sutra** (3:52) and **Vijnana-Bhairava Tantra** (62). Says the **Vijnana-Bhairava**: "Let not the mind, having just quit one object of perception, turn to another. For, by means of that which is between them (i.e., between one perception and the next), the Great Realisation (of Reality) unfolds in all its intensity".

The **Yoga Sutra** also declares: "**Higher Knowledge is attained through concentration on the moment**". As has been rightly said: it is through Yoga that Wisdom arises. It is only through Wisdom (or Higher Knowledge) derived from Spiritual Practice that the Self, the World, and everything else is truly known. By penetrating into the intermediate space between one moment of perception and the next, we gain access to the mysteries of life itself.

In the Yoga Tradition, the Supreme Lord is compared to a Great Magician (Mayavin, Mayin) who creates the Universe by means of his Magic Power (Maya), and also with a Great Artist who paints the Universe against the canvas of infinite space.

As the 9th-century Kashmiri Saint and poet, Bhattanarayana beautifully puts it: "Obeisance to the Divine Trident-Bearer Who, even in the absence of a wall, unfolds the painting of the Universe without cause or instrument. Great indeed, is His skill!" (Stavachintamani 9).

Shiva, the Supreme Lord and Wielder of the Trident of Divine Powers (Will, Knowledge, Action), is the Supreme Artist Who paints the Universe against the background of His Own Changeless Consciousness. In the same way as we can make out how a painter produces a painting by having a close look at the thousands of brush strokes of paint that together bring a work of art to life, so also by concentrating on the moments of perception, we can discover the secrets of Creation.

The Supreme Being creates the World for His Own enjoyment. He delights in the Cosmic Play (Leela) of Creation, Permanence and Dissolution. In His Infinite Compassion, the Lord of the Universe invites us to discover the secrets of Creation, that we may participate in His Highest Mysteries and share in His Supreme Majesty and Glory.

Thus, in every moment of Time an Atom of Life (Anu) comes into being and endures for a while. The Supreme Being's **Universal Consciousness (Parasamvid)** creates the World as a projection of Its own **Power of Creative Intelligence (Spanda Shakti)**. All the energy particles, or units of perception, that constitute the World are therefore projected into being, withdrawn into their source and projected again at unimaginably small intervals (or high frequency), giving the impression of continuity and permanence.

For this reason Scripture says: "As waves from Water, as sparks from a Fire, as rays from the Sun, all life springs forth from Me, the Lord, the Source of all Life". The intervals at which the atoms of Consciousness (or units of perception) are projected into "measured" or limited life are the smallest units of Time. In consequence, they represent the points at which limited time and limited life come into being as an inseparable unity.

By concentrating our awareness on the interval between one moment and another, we eventually break the chain of limited time and enter into the domain of Eternal Life. We thus complete the Soul's journey from impermanence to Eternity, from humanity to Divinity, from death to Immortality and from darkness to Infinite Light. Yoga is the Glorious Path that leads from the suffering and isolation of ordinary life to the Boundless Freedom and Bliss of **Unity with the Supreme**.

For a better understanding of the Yogic concept of time and its relevance to Spiritual practice, see also [Indian Calendar](#).

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 24

THE INDIAN (HINDU) CALENDAR AND KALI YUGA

QUESTION: Does Yoga prescribe the use of a particular calendar?

ANSWER: The Holy Land of India is the sacred ground on which Yoga Dharma has flourished for millennia. It is only natural, therefore, that Yoga has close links to Indian culture and civilisation. In consequence, the calendar used in Yoga is practically the same as the one currently used in India.

Solar and Lunar Years

The Traditional Indian Calendar is one of the most beautiful and fascinating calendars known to Mankind. It is also the oldest in use today, being mentioned in the Ancient Scriptures of India (Rig Veda). It ingeniously combines solar and lunar references to accurately calculate the passage of time.

The basis for this is provided by two naturally occurring, parallel cycles:

1. The progression of the Sun along the twelve Constellations of the Zodiac from Aries to Pisces. This **Solar Cycle** determines the Year and the Seasons. Thus the Year commences with the Sun's entrance into the Constellation of Aries, which translated into Western time-reckoning falls on the Spring Equinox (22 March). This is known as **Yugadi** or the First Day of the Solar Year which consists of twelve months ending on the day before the next Spring Equinox.

2. The phases of the Moon. The Moon has four basic Phases: New Moon, First Quarter, Full Moon and Last Quarter, occurring at intervals of approximately seven days. A set of four such Phases constitutes one "Moon" or Lunar Month of thirty lunar days or Tithis (Digits). Twelve such Months make up one Lunar Year.

The **Lunar Cycle** is calculated as commencing with the last New Moon before the Spring Equinox (22 March). This is known as the First Day of the Lunar Year which ends with the New Moon before the next Spring Equinox. (Lunar New Year's Day may also be calculated as the fourth New Moon from Winter Solstice - 22 December).

The Indian Solar Year has a duration of 365.258 days which are divided into twelve months of varying lengths (29-31 days). As the Lunar Month lasts 29.5 days it is shorter than most Solar Months. To harmonise the Lunar Year with the Solar Year, an extra month (Adhika Masa) is added to the Lunar Cycle every thirty months.

The Months of the Indian Year

Solar Months are reckoned as lasting from one Zodiac Sign to the next. Thus the Sun's passage through one Zodiac Sign determines the length of each month. All Indian months are named after the Sanskrit name of Constellations. They are indicated below alongside their Western equivalent:

1. Chaitra	(22 March - 20 April)
2. Vaisakha	(21 April - 21 May)
3. Jyeshtha	(22 May - 21 June)
4. Ashadha	(22 June - 22 July)
5. Shravana	(23 July - 22 August)
6. Bhadrapada	(23 August - 22 September)
7. Ashvina	(23 September - 22 October)
8. Karttika	(23 October - 21 November)
9. Margashirsha (Agrahayana)	(22 November - 21 December)
10. Pausha	(22 December - 20 January)

11. Magha	(21 January - 19 February)
12. Phalgun	(20 February - 21 March)

Lunar Months are reckoned as lasting from one New Moon to the next and are named after the Solar Months in which they begin. For example, if New Moon falls on February 8th, then the Lunar Month beginning on that date will take the name of the Solar Month Magha (which lasts from 21 Jan to 19 Feb, see chart). The following Month will take the name of Phalgun, etc.

An alternative method is to count from Full Moon to Full Moon and name each Lunar Month after the following Solar Months.

In practice, it makes little difference which method we use as each Lunar Month is divided into two halves or fortnights, one called "bright" and the other "dark" according as the Moon is waxing (growing) or waning (diminishing), and the days are counted from the beginning of each fortnight. The main difference is Spiritual or religious in nature, as New Moon, in Yoga, is especially sacred to Lord Shiva - as will be explained later.

The Week

The **Solar Month** is divided into approximately four seven-day Weeks, just as in the Western Calendar. Similarly, the days of the Week are named after the Celestial Bodies, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn and the Sun.

The **Lunar Month**, on the other hand, has no weeks. Instead, it is divided into Fortnights or Half Months (Ardha Masa) which are also known as Paksha (Wings). The two halves of the Month (1) from New Moon to Full Moon and (2) from Full Moon to New Moon are conceived of as the two "wings" of the Moon: one called Bright (Shukla Paksha) and the other Dark (Krishna or Bahula Paksha).

As the two Half Months have 15 days each, Lunar Days are named after their corresponding Sanskrit ordinal numbers (1st, 2nd, etc.) with the exception of the 15th which is called Full Moon (Purnima) and the 30th which is called New Moon or Conjunction (Amavasya).

What is New Moon?

An important point that requires clarification at this stage is the exact definition of "**New Moon**". In everyday language, **New Moon** means the First Crescent when seen after the Moon's Conjunction with the Sun. However, in astronomical terms, "New Moon" means the Day of Conjunction itself, on which **No Moon** is seen in the Sky. It is in this, second sense that "New Moon" is used here. This is also the meaning of the Indian term, "Amavasya".

The reason why no Moon is seen on New Moon or Conjunction Day (Amavasya), is because at the moment of New Moon, the Moon is positioned right between the Sun and Earth in such a way as for the Moon's sunlit half to be facing the Sun while her dark half is facing the Earth.

This special position of the Moon means that both Sun and Moon rise at approximately the same time in the same place on the horizon, travel across the sky together, and finally set, the Moon remaining all the while positioned between the Sun and Earth.

This is why New Moon in Sanskrit is called the **Conjunction** or **Dwelling-together (Amavasya)** of **Sun** and **Moon**. The visual effect of this is that the disc of the Moon is outshone by the Sun. Thus the normally

visible Moon is consumed, as it were, by the Sun's fiery embrace to be released on the following day in a purified and rejuvenated form when the First Crescent or Digit of the Moon becomes visible again.

In consequence, **New Moon**, or more accurately, **No Moon** occurs at the end of the Lunar Month when the Last Crescent of the Waning Moon, which was visible on the horizon just before sunrise on the previous day, is no longer seen.

NOTE: Strictly speaking, the moment of New Moon in the Indian Calendar marks the end of one Month and the beginning of the next. In practice, however, while **New Moon Day (Amavasya)** is reckoned as the last day of the expiring Month, the following day is called the **First (Pratipada or Prathama)** of the beginning Month.

The second day is called the Second, and so on up to the fifteenth day which is called Full Moon (Purnima). This makes a complete Fortnight or Half Month (Paksha or Ardha Masa) of fifteen days. After Full Moon, the second Half Month commences with day First (Pratipada), and so on, until the next New Moon or last day of the Month. Thus the basic unit of time after the Day, is the Fortnight.

Bright Fortnight (Shukla Paksha)	Dark Fortnight (Krishna Paksha)
1st. Pratipada (First Crescent)	1st. Pratipada
2nd. Dvitiya	2nd. Dvitiya
3rd. Tritiya	3rd. Tritiya
4th. Chaturthi	4th. Chaturthi
5th. Panchami	5th. Panchami
6th. Shashthi	6th. Shashthi
7th. Saptami	7th. Saptami
8th. ASHTAMI (First Quarter)	8th. ASHTAMI (Last Quarter)
9th. Navami	9th. Navami
10th. Dashami	10th. Dashami
11th. Ekadashi	11th. Ekadashi
12th. Dvadashi	12th. Dvadashi
13th. Trayodashi	13th. Trayodashi
14th. Chaturdashi	14th. Chaturdashi (Shivaratri)
15th. PURNIMA (Full Moon)	15th. AMAVASYA (New Moon)

The date of **Maha Shivaratri** would be given as "**Magha Krishna Chaturdashi**" or "the Fourteenth of the Dark Half of Magha"; **Teej (Tritiya Tithi)** would be "**Bhadrapada Shukla Tritiya**" or "the Third of the Dark Half of Bhadrpadapa", etc. If we wish to indicate the year, we need to add, for instance, **Kali Yuga (the Current Indian Age) 5106** before the month: (1) **KY 5106, Magha Kr. 14** or short (2) **5106, Magha 29** (the 14th of the Dark Fortnight being the same as the 29th of the Month); (3) Shorter still would be **5106. 11. 29**. However, the first example would be the clearest, unless the intended reader is familiar with the calendar used.

Holy Days

The most frequently observed holy days of the Indian Calendar are the Eighth and the Fifteenth of every Half Month. Thus counting from the first day after New Moon, we have: (1) the Eighth of the Bright Half (First Quarter), (2) the Fifteenth of the Bright Half (Full Moon), (3) the Eighth of the Dark Half (Last Quarter) and (4) the Fifteenth of the Dark Half (New Moon). As they occur at intervals of approximately seven days, they are comparable to the weekly holidays of Western faiths.

In addition to these weekly holidays there is a very important monthly one, namely, **Shiva Ratri**, which takes place on the 14th day of the Dark Half of the Month or the day before New Moon (Amavasya, as defined above).

Both Shiva Ratri (the Night of Shiva) and New Moon are sacred to the Supreme Lord and are celebrated together as part of a two-day festival that marks the end of one month and the beginning of the next. Traditionally, Shiva Ratri is a three-day (or 36-hour) festival lasting approximately from midnight on the 13th to midday on the 15th or New Moon Day (Amavasya).

The Half Year

In the same way as Lunar Months are divided into bright and dark Fortnights or Half Months, Solar Years are divided into Half Years of Six Months each.

The Year is conceived of as a wheel consisting of the circular movement of the Sun in relation to Earth. The first half of the wheel or Half Year is that during which daylight increases. The Sun is then said to take a northward course for which reason this Half Year is called the **Northern** or **Higher Path (Uttara Ayana)**.

The second half of the Year is that during which daylight decreases and the Sun is said to take a southward course. For this reason, it is known as the **Southern** or **Lower Path (Dakshina Ayana)**.

Days, Hours and Minutes

As in the calendars of Ancient Sumer, Egypt and China, the **Day** in Indian timekeeping is always calculated as commencing at sunrise as opposed to midnight (as in the West) or sunset (as in certain Middle Eastern traditions). A **Day (Vara)** as a 24-hour unit of time, therefore, lasts from one sunrise (6 a.m.) to the next.

The Standard Indian Time used in the traditional calendar is called **Lanka Time**. It is based on the longitude of the Central-Indian City of **Ujjain** (75 46 6) and the latitude of an island situated on the equator in the Indian Ocean and having the same longitude as Ujjain, called **Lanka (after Shri Lanka)**.

The basic division of the **Day** is the **Prahara** or **Watch** which is a period of three hours. Thus the day proper lasts four Watches from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. and the night lasts a further four Watches from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m., giving a total of eight Watches per Day. Midnight, for example, falls on the beginning of the 3rd Watch (or Prahara) of the night, sunrise in the first Watch of the day, etc.

The **Day** is further divided into thirty **Muhurta** of 48 minutes. Apart from this, the Western and Indian systems are very much the same in that they are both sexagesimal, that is, they reckon by the 60th part of a unit.

Thus one **Muhurta** equals two **Ghatika** (2x24 min.). Therefore, one **Day** (30 Muhurta) equals sixty **Ghatika** (60x24 min.); one **Ghatika** equals sixty **Chashaka** (60x24 sec.) and one **Chashaka** equals sixty **Nimesha (Twinklings)** (60x0.4 sec.).

The Indian Muhurta (48 min.) is roughly the equivalent of the Western hour; the Ghatika the equivalent of half an hour; the Chashaka half a minute and the Nimesha half a second.

As the Western system is known to have evolved in the East, it is obvious that both systems have a **common origin**.

The Four World Ages

One of the fundamental fallacies of Western and Western-influenced scholars when studying Indian culture, is their inability to grasp the fact that it is essentially Spiritual. The Indian Calendar is no exception. Far from being a mere instrument for calculating time, it represents a living expression of the timeless Spirituality of India.

The Ancient Scriptures of India (Rig Veda) compare life to the rolling wheels of carts, bringing sometimes good, sometimes bad fortune, as it revolves. Just as night and day follow each other, so also everything, from an individual person to the whole of Mankind, goes through alternating periods of prosperity and decline, of decay and regeneration.

In the Yoga Tradition, Time is divided into **World Ages** or **Yugas**. The first of these is **Satya Yuga**, the **Golden Age of Enlightenment and Truth** which is the longest, lasting 4,800 Celestial Years. (One Celestial Year equals 360 terrestrial years.) The second **World Age** is **Treta Yuga**, the **Silver Age of Devotion** lasting 3,600 Celestial Years. The third **World Age**, called **Dvapara Yuga**, is the **Copper Age of Reason** which lasts 2,400 Celestial Years. The fourth and last **World Age** is the shortest. It lasts only 1,200 Celestial Years and is known as **Kali Yuga** or the **Iron Age of Action**. Being a time of growing Spiritual decline, it is also known as the **Age of Darkness**.

This Four-Age Cycle repeats itself many times over till the End of the World when Material Creation is reabsorbed into the Universal Spirit (Parama Shiva). As we are only 5100 years into the Last World Age, the End of the World is not imminent. **Although Western Scriptures like the Bible and the Quran declare it to be "near", the End of the World has clearly not happened and it will not happen for a long time to come.**

Kali Yuga - the Age of Darkness

This, of course, does not mean to say that Mankind is "safe". As already indicated, the World is going through a phase of Spiritual decline. To be sure, within the main downward course, there are brief periods of rising and falling. Individuals, groups of people and even entire nations may, indeed, temporarily prosper. Yet the general state of the World is indisputably one of decline.

The real threat is not that God will wipe out the World out of the blue. The Enlightened Yogis and Prophets (Rishis) of India assure us that there is no danger from God Who is Our Creator and Friend. The World will come to an end one day, but not yet. The true danger comes not from God but from man himself.

Materialism, immorality, crime, violence, war, genocide, disease, overpopulation, poverty, the destruction of natural resources and environmental disasters are not the work of God but the result of man's own actions. And they are on the rise. Even the most sceptical among us cannot deny what is patent fact.

India is herself an adequate illustration of this situation. Rich in natural resources and blessed with an ideal, life-promoting climate, India was a true Paradise on Earth in prehistoric times.

Historical and archaeological records show that early in her history India was a great nation that extended from Thailand in the East to Afghanistan in the West and from Tibet in the North to Shri Lanka in the

South. Close cultural and economic ties with Ancient Europe, Egypt and East Asia, made India one of the wealthiest and most powerful nations on Earth up to the 10th and 11th centuries of the current era.

Today, much of Ancient India is under the brutal occupation of foreign powers and her people are either enslaved or divided by cultural, political and religious conflicts. Kashmir, Afghanistan and Pakistan, once home to many a renowned centre of Yogic, Hindu and Buddhist learning, are now hotbeds of international terrorism. The same applies to many other places on Earth, mainly in Asia and Africa but increasingly also in the Americas and Europe.

According to the time records of the Ancient Yoga Masters and Prophets (Rishis) this global process of human degradation and degeneration began with the present World Age in the year 3102 BC (before the current era), that is over 5100 years ago, in the third watch of the night on New Moon Day in the Month of Magha (midnight between 17th and 18th February).

As Scripture declares, Karma produces its fruit slowly, like the Earth. The fruits of past sins are now slowly engulfing the World like the shadow of death. Light shall return to Earth only when Mankind embraces Yoga Dharma which is the Eternal Path of Unity with the Supreme.

The historical proof

As the traditional Indian Calendar begins with **Kali Yuga Year 1**, it is obviously far ahead of its modern Western counterpart. To convert a Kali Yuga date into a Western one, it is necessary to subtract 3102 from the former. Conversely, Western (AD or CE, current era) dates are translated into their Kali Yuga equivalents by adding 3102. For example, CE (AD) **2004** + 3102 = **KY 5106** current or 5105 expired, depending on the month and day.

It is noteworthy that the date of 3102 BC or the approximate equivalent thereof, appears to have been important in the traditions of Ancient Egypt, Central America and other Ancient Civilisations. Thus, in the Egyptian tradition, the year 3101 BC commemorates the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt (under King Menes). Similarly, in the Maya tradition of Central America, 3114 BC marks the beginning of a New World Age. (In common with the traditions of India - Yogic, Hindu, Jain, Buddhist - the Maya believed in recurring cycles of World Renewal, Preservation and Degeneration.)

The exception to this is the Jewish tradition, where 3761 BC represents the beginning or creation of the World. However, as the World was clearly created long before that date, it cannot mark the creation itself but the **beginning** of a **New World Age**. The Jewish tradition therefore represents a deviation from both the universally accepted, original date and its significance.

It is difficult to reconstruct the exact circumstances and events that occasioned this corruption of the Original Teaching. Perhaps internal and external conflicts made it difficult for the Spiritual leaders of the Jewish people to preserve the Original Teaching in all its details. The fact remains that this deviation was later inadvertently adopted by the Christian and Muslim traditions and resulted in the Western World's separation from, and opposition to, the Original World Faith (Adi Dharma). This confusion and conflict is, of course, the distinctive characteristic of the Age of Darkness (Kali Yuga) as predicted by the Prophets of India. Which again proves our point.

The concordance between the chronological traditions of the various Great Civilisations of the World (Indian, Egyptian, Central American), constitutes proof that some extraordinary event must have occurred at that time, which marked the beginning of a New Era in the history of Mankind.

In consequence, the question that may be raised at this point is, why was the 18th February 3002 so important as to calculate time from that date? There are a number of reasons of which we shall enumerate but a few:

(1) Regarding the day, Shiva Ratri, Shiva's Fourteenth, or New Moon Eve marks the advent of the New Moon which is the end of a month and the beginning of a new one.

(2) Regarding the month or time of the year, Shiva Ratri in the Month of Magha falls on the end of February and the beginning of March, giving or taking a fortnight - according to the phases of the Moon. This is the time of the year when Winter comes to an end and Spring arrives bringing light and warmth. Many plants now begin to give new leaves. It is therefore a celebration of new life and the appropriate time to begin a new year.

(3) At the same time, the Month of Magha (late February - March) is the end of the agricultural year when, in many parts of India, food crops such as barley and wheat are reaped and gathered in. It therefore represents an occasion to celebrate harvest time and the generosity of God's Creation. The year, therefore, had began at that time since earliest prehistoric time.

(4) Regarding the century, it represents the beginning of a New World Age, in which Mankind enters a new and critical phase in its history. Modern scientists have confirmed that some 5,200 - 5,100 years ago there was a shift in the Earth's axis which resulted in major climate changes affecting the lives of people all over the World.

Many Ancient Civilisations perished as a result of excessive cold or heat, floods, drought, crop failure, war and disease. To the West of India, the century immediately preceding the fifth millennium before the present day, marked the fall of Sumer (Ancient Mesopotamia) to foreign powers and the beginning of a steady decline of its unique civilisation. India herself was, and still is, similarly affected.

(5) Regarding the year, **the most important reason for the calendar itself to begin in 3102 BC, is not material but Spiritual.** From a purely Spiritual point of view, Maha Shivaratri celebrates the Supreme Lord's Revelation or Re-Introduction of the Eternal Teachings of Yoga (Yoga Dharma) to Mankind, which occurs at the beginning of each World Age, including the current Age, Kali Yuga.

Says Scripture: "In every World Age, Lord Shiva incarnates as Teacher of Yoga (Yogacharya) and propagates its wisdom for the Salvation of His devotees" (Shiva Purana, Vayaviya Samhita I, 32:14; II, 8:43, etc.). Thus the Shiva Ratri festival reminds us of the fact that human life has a Spiritual purpose and that we must be grateful to the Supreme Lord for showing us the Right Way in which we may fulfil that purpose. This is the true meaning of that date.

As we shall presently demonstrate, the intent and purpose of the Indian Calendar is primarily Spiritual.

The Calendar of Ancient India

The traditional Indian Calendar was originally lunar - "The Moon is that which shapes the years" says the Rig Veda - and it remains essentially unchanged even today.

The movement of the Sun - or his position relative to Earth - was undoubtedly employed for determining the seasons and marking important activities such as sowing and harvesting, from prehistoric times.

Regular occurrences like the **solstices** and **equinoxes** are closely connected with weather conditions such as changes in daylight, air temperature, etc. In consequence, they couldn't have escaped ancient man's keen sense of observation. Likewise, the Sun's path across the firmament linked him with certain constellations giving rise to the twelve Signs of the Zodiac.

For this reason, the Indian Solar Year commences with the Sun's entrance into the Sign of Aries (Ram) which is variously calculated as falling on 21st of April (traditional) or 22nd of March (reformed calendar, see above).

However, apart from astrology and agriculture, the Solar Year has never attained much importance in India. Religious holidays continue to be observed according to the phases of the Moon. The Lunar Cycle, therefore, remains the most important, religiously and Spiritually speaking. The calendar described in the Ancient Gospels of India (Puranas) is essentially lunar.

The Rig Veda on its part, speaks of a 360-day, twelve-month year which may refer to a solar calendar. Thus it is written: "The holy priests, by their seasons know, O Sun God! those two wheels of yours: one kept concealed, those only who are skilled in highest truths have learned" (X 85:16). And again, "Formed with twelve spokes, by length of time, unweakened, rolls round the Heaven this wheel of during Order. Herein established, joined in pairs together, seven hundred Sons and twenty stand, O Fiery One!" (I 164:11).

The twelve spokes of course are the twelve Months. The Wheel is the Solar Year. The seven hundred and twenty Sons (or Children) of the Sun God are the 360 Days and 360 Nights which are "joined together in pairs".

Interestingly, during excavations carried out in the 1980's near Karachi, there was found a jar containing jewellery from the Indus Valley period (2000 BC), including a string of thirty-six elongated carnelian (reddish stone) beads interspersed with bronze beads. It would seem reasonable to surmise that it represented a form of portable calendar, one bead symbolising a period of ten days. As in the lunar calendar, the solar year had 360 days divided into 12 months of 30 days each. The months in turn were divided into three ten-day periods prior to the introduction of the seven-day week.

Solar calendars based on a 360-day year, no doubt existed in India as in Ancient Egypt, Sumer and elsewhere. Such a calendar, however, would have required the addition of five extra days at the end of each year to match the actual duration of a solar cycle. And it would have required a further addition of one day every four years to maintain its synchrony with the Sun.

The Lunar Calendar, on the other hand, requires no such adjustments. It may be harmonised with the Solar Cycle as in the present-day Indian Calendar. Yet it can equally well run indefinitely on its own, the sole requirement being the regular observation of the phases of the Moon as they naturally occur. For this reason, it is the preferred method of religious time keeping in Yoga as in Hinduism and Buddhism. To determine a lunar date in advance, lay people usually rely on priests and astrologers. Monks on the other hand, often use their own personal calendar.

The Calendar as a Path to Enlightenment

We have seen, during our discussion on **Kali Yuga**, that the Kali Yuga Calendar reckons the passage of time from the midnight of New Moon Day in the Month of Magha. Now the New Moon Eve of Magha happens to be the Holy Night of Shiva (Shiva Ratri).

This can only mean one thing: **that Maha Shivaratri originally marked the end of a year and the beginning of the next.**

Thus in his Encyclopedia of Religion, professor Mircea Eliade writes: "Mahashivaratri, the Great Night of Shiva, the climax of the religious year, is celebrated on the fourteenth lunar day of the dark half of the **last month of the Lunar Year.**"

This is only natural, as Maha Shivaratri takes place at the end of Magha, the last Winter month. The first month of the year, therefore was Phalgun which is the first month of Spring.

Indeed, Lord Shiva has always been associated with Spring. The Holy Scriptures of India describe Mount Kailasa, Shiva's abode on Earth, as a place where Spring eternally reigns, where forests resound with the passionate song of Indian cuckoos (heralds of Spring), etc. Moreover, Spring (Vasanta Panchami) is celebrated in the same month as Maha Shivaratri, namely, on Magha Shukla 5.

It follows from this that the lunar year and by extension, the Lunar Calendar itself, was dedicated to Lord Shiva. This is evidenced by the fact that throughout India every New Moon Eve (the end of every month) is observed in honour of Lord Shiva.

Nor is this surprising. For the Supreme Lord (Parama Shiva) is the Lord of Eternity or Endless Time (Maha Kala). As Lord of Time (Kala-Natha) He rules over past, present and future. His Emblem is the Crescent Moon which He wears in His Crown.

The Moon (Masa) is that which has measured time from the beginning of the World. As Scripture puts it, "The Moon is that which shapes the years". Time itself (Kala) is the Power whereby the Supreme Being measures up or divides His Undivided, Unmeasured Eternal Self (Nishkala) into measured, limited portions of time (Kala) thereby giving life to the Universe of phenomena.

Time (Kaala), Moon Digit (Kalaa, the sixteenth part of the Moon's diameter) and Atom (Kalaa, unit of existence) all come from the root Kal, to count, to measure. For this reason, the Supreme Lord, the Lord of Time, is known as "He Who bears the Digit of the Moon" (Kala-Dhara) and "Lord of Destiny" (Kala-Yogin).

All created things are determined by Time. Time brings things into the World and Time takes them away. By understanding Time we understand how the Creation, Maintenance and Dissolution of all things comes about. Finally we understand the Highest Mystery of all: the Holder of the Power of Time, Supreme Lord Shiva Himself. As the great Marathi poet and Saint, Jnanadeva, has said in the Amritanubhava: "Where there are flames, there is also fire; when we catch hold of Shakti (Divine Power), we have Shiva as well" (I, 24).

Shiva Mahadeva - Lord of Time

To be Lord of Time means to be Lord over Life and Death. Yama Rajah, the God of Death, is a Manifestation of the Supreme Lord. He is Shiva's Divine Messenger (Dutah) who summons the Souls to start on their journey of return to their Creator, when their time has come. This is why Shiva is sometimes erroneously regarded as the God of Destruction. In reality, He is the Lord of Everything (Vishvanatha). As death is part of life, the Lord of Life is also Lord of Death. The death of the physical body is necessary for the Soul to start a new life. Thus Death is not destruction but a new beginning. This is the secret of life.

Lord Shiva is not only Lord of Eternal Time, He is also Lord of Enlightenment. He who knows the secret of Time, knows everything. The Moon, therefore, which symbolises knowledge of Time, also symbolises Spiritual Knowledge in general. Indeed, the Crescent Moon, Shiva's Sacred Emblem, means growing light (from Latin *crescere*, to grow). This fact is borne out by Yogic Scriptures with such titles as "Moonlight of Consciousness and Being", "Moon Wisdom", etc.

The Shiva Samhita advises Spiritual seekers to contemplate on the sixteen-digit (i.e., Full) Moon shining in the place between the eyebrows where resides the **Great White Lord of Time (Shukla Mahaakaala)**. By doing this without interruption for three days the Yogi becomes free of sin, he knows the future and is endowed with magic powers (V, 96,148).

The Moon, therefore, represents the Pure, Spiritual Knowledge (Shuddha Vidya) of Enlightenment. Becoming enlightened means to allow Shiva's Infinite Light (Ananta Prakasha) into our life so that our entire existence is filled by it in the same way as the disc of the Moon is full of light when the Moon is Full. When that happens, man sees the World as it really is and his Soul becomes united with the Supreme Light like the flame of a candle joining a larger flame.

Man begins his life on Earth by breathing in his first and departs from this World by breathing out his last breath. In Yoga, therefore, breath is equated with both life and time. The air we breathe in represents the past and the air we breathe out the future. The interval between inbreath and outbreath is the present moment. The outbreath (prana) represents the day and the inbreath (apana) the night. The interval between them in dusk and dawn.

The outbreath is the dark fortnight when the Moon empties herself to nourish the World with her light while the inbreath is the bright fortnight when the Moon is nourished by the Sun of Consciousness in our heart. The interval between is the sixteenth day of the Moon on which the two half months of fifteen days revolve.

The outbreath is the half year from Capricorn to Gemini and the inbreath is the half year from Cancer to Sagittarius. Or the half years from the Month of Phalguna to Shravana and from Bhadrapada to Magha. The intervals between the two are the winter and summer solstices, the beginning and end of Spring and Autumn, etc.

Says Scripture: "Within every breath there is contained every period of time: the hours, the days, the months, the years and the space of many years". Such is the glory of the Sacred Calendar of India, which, when properly understood by means of the Eternal Wisdom of Yoga, becomes a stairway to the Highest Heaven!

The awareness of the correspondence between inner biological processes and outer natural phenomena leads to the experience of Unity between the personal and Cosmic dimensions of existence, enabling the Yogi to enjoy Union with the Supreme (Shiva-Samyoga). By contrast, he who fails to develop this awareness is a failed Yogi.

Thus it is written: "Without knowledge of the true nature of creation, maintenance and dissolution, there can be no Liberation for as has been said in the Yogasamchara Tantra, Liberation is caused by the knowledge of all things. The Yogis who ignore this are not liberated, for they are bound by the fetters of their own ignorance" (Tantraloka).

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 25

HOW TO BECOME A YOGI

QUESTION: How can I become a Yogi?

ANSWER: In order to become a Yogi it is necessary to properly understand what Yoga is.

Yoga is known worldwide as a system of physical postures which helps us maintain our physical and emotional balance and well-being.

What is less well-known is that Yoga is an Ancient Spirituality whose time-honoured wisdom can help us understand the meaning and purpose of life so that we may find true happiness and fulfilment.

Above all, Yoga teaches us how to correctly relate to ourselves and to our fellow humans in order to create harmony and unity both within and around us. In the confused and conflict-ridden World of today, this is of particular importance and urgency.

Who is Shiva?

To correctly understand Yoga, we must begin by understanding the meaning of the Supreme Principle of Yoga.

Yoga believes in a Supreme Being the essence of whom is Pure Goodness and who is therefore known as Shiva.

Most people believe in a God who is good. According to Western Scriptures, however, God is not purely good. He can be angry, jealous, envious, vengeful, and so on.

Yoga regards such concepts as man's unwarranted attempts to humanise God. The World is currently in a state of Spiritual and moral decline precisely because of this dysfunctional way in which man relates to God and fellow men.

Instead of elevating himself to higher modes of thinking, man irrationally attempts to bring God down to his own level of understanding (or misunderstanding). This necessarily leads to a steady fall in the Spiritual consciousness of man with grave consequences for the whole Planet as recent events (natural disasters, terrorism, wars) clearly show.

Therefore, the Enlightened Yoga Masters, from Buddha down to modern teachers, urge us to wake up to reality before it is too late. We must understand that God does not entertain such base emotions as jealousy, envy and anger, let alone act on them. Far from having anything to do with negative and destructive feelings, God is Pure Goodness (Shivam).

This is the Message the Yoga Masters are bringing to the World: The sacred word "Shiva" which is the title held by the Supreme Deity, means "Good". Shiva is everything that is Good: Goodness, Beauty, Truth, Light, Wisdom, Happiness, Wholeness, Unity, Harmony, Friendship, Love, Compassion, Justice, etc. All that is Shiva.

By contrast, jealousy, envy, vengeance, are not Divine but human emotions. They take us away from both God and fellow humans.

When we experience a degree of any of the above Divine Emotions within us, we experience an aspect of Shiva. The practice of Yoga, however, enables us to experience not just a fragment of Shiva but Shiva Himself in His pure and unadulterated Majesty and Glory. We then enjoy a never-ending range of all the Divine attributes described above and are able to share them with our fellow humans, thereby bringing God's Goodness into the World.

Shiva and the World

To understand how the Supreme Being is related to the World, we need no rigorous study of Scripture or lengthy philosophical or religious debates. A little knowledge of the Sanskrit language will enable us to analyse the sacred word "Shiva" into its constituent syllables or verbal roots, "Shi" and "Va".

Shi (shee) means to lie or rest, which refers to the fact that all things lie or rest within Shiva, the ultimate Ground and Support of all things. Va (vah) means to move and refers to the fact that all things move and live their life within Shiva.

Shiva, therefore, is the Supreme All-Encompassing and All-Embracing Reality in Whom all things exist and by Whose Power all things move.

Because Shiva contains everything within Himself, He knows everything, just as a man knows all the thoughts and feelings he holds in his heart. And because He is the Power that animates all things, Shiva is All-Powerful. Hence He is Omniscient and Omnipotent.

Moreover, Shiva is not just the Supreme Sovereign Who Creates and Rules over the World. He is also a Friend and Guide to the entire World. He is the Embodiment of Truth, Goodness and Compassion (Maitreya, the True Messiah). He is the World Teacher (Jagat Guru) Who descends upon Earth in times of need in order to save the World from itself.

However, what is important to understand is that God doesn't save the World by sacrificing Himself or by suffering with and on behalf of man as some religions would like us to believe. Having somebody to share your suffering is a nice thought but is no solution to suffering!

God, therefore, saves the World by telling man why he is suffering and how he can mend his ways to avoid suffering in future. He saves the World by reminding Mankind of the Original Teaching revealed by God at the beginning of time, which has become distorted and forgotten over the centuries. All man needs to do is follow His Eternal Teaching (Sanatana Dharma).

Yoga and other Faiths

Just as the God of Yoga is an All-Embracing Reality, Yoga which is the living expression of that Reality, is an All-Inclusive Faith.

In Yoga, nobody is required to abandon their own faith. All that is needed is to understand what Yoga is and how it relates to other faiths. This is all.

All religions claim to possess the highest truth, and Yoga agrees that they all contain some truth. However, the fact remains that religions also contain errors. The following few examples will be sufficient to illustrate this important point.

Islam: It is written in the Quran, the holy book of Islam, that those who commit adultery must be punished by flogging: "The adulterer and adulteress shall each be given a hundred lashes" (24:2). It is also written that "God is forgiving and merciful and he who repents and does good works shall have his sins turned into good deeds" (25:69-70). Islamic law, however, prescribes the stoning to death of those found guilty of the above offence, in particular female offenders. This clearly constitutes an extreme interpretation of Scripture which contravenes the general principles of justice and compassion.

As another example, in criticising Christian beliefs, the Quran says that God cannot have a son because He doesn't have a consort. Christians, however, do not claim that God produced a son by means of a consort but by impregnating Mary, Jesus's mother, with His Divine Spirit. Mary was not the consort of God but of Joseph, Jesus's physical father. This criticism, therefore, is logically and factually flawed.

It follows from this that the main errors of Islam are: (1) the extreme interpretation of the Quran and (2) the wrong interpretation of other faiths. The first error leads to injustice and conflict within the Muslim community and the second to injustice and conflict between Muslims and other faiths. As a result, in Islamic countries like Saudi Arabia, Iran and Pakistan, non-Islamic faiths are systematically persecuted and oppressed.

Christianity: It is written in the Christian Scripture (Bible) that God is Light and that His Light shines within man whose body is the temple of God - an ancient Yogic teaching. One would expect Christians to

take notice of this and attempt to find the Divine Light within themselves, just as Yogis have done for millennia. However, such an enterprise is conspicuously absent in the official teachings of the Church.

Instead, there is an excessive preoccupation with Jesus who allegedly came into the World to suffer for man's sins and thereby save the World. If Christians admitted that Jesus was the leader of a local religious group, nobody could reasonably object. But if they insist that he saved the World, and therefore his followers are entitled to rule the World, this is contradicted by both reason and facts: the World has largely remained unchanged and continues to be as afflicted by sin and suffering as ever.

Judaism: It is written in the Scripture of the Jews (Torah): "Blessed is the man whose delight is in the Law of the Lord and who meditates on His Law day and night". The Law of God is the Ten Commandments which are similar to the Ten Commandments of Yoga (the Five Yamas and Niyamas or Five Prohibitions and Five Obligations).

One of the main Commandments which were given by God Yahweh to prophet Moses is "You shall not kill" (equivalent to Ahimsa or Non-violence in Yoga). However, soon after receiving the Law, Moses ordered his followers to kill thousands of men, women and children as a punishment for dancing round a gold calf. Since the actions of the prophet of Judaism stand in blatant contradiction of Divine Law, this constitutes a grave error.

As another example, God Yahweh, the God of Israel, tells his disciples to desist from worshipping other Gods because he is a jealous God. Now it is a well-known fact that the Gods (or Angels as some call them) are nothing but manifestations of God's Powers. Indeed, they cannot be anything else. This being so, it seems preposterous to suppose that God could be jealous of His Own Powers.

Moreover, we know on the testimony of Enlightened Yogis and the Holy Scriptures of India, that God is Pure Consciousness and Bliss. Such base sentiments as jealousy cannot therefore be reasonably attributed to God.

It follows from this that the God Yahweh is not the Supreme God but only a minor deity or local spirit worshipped by the Israelites. In consequence, modern Judaism or Yahweism - as opposed to Ancient (pre-Mosaic) Judaism - cannot claim to be a World Religion but only a local cult. To believe anything else is a serious error.

The same applies to other Western religions, such as Islam. For example, it is written in the Quran that God has sent to the Arabs "an apostle of their own who speaks to them in the Arab tongue, because before they were ignorant".

Furthermore it is written that, "Every nation has its mentor" and "For every community God has ordained a ritual which they observe; let there be no dispute over this" (13:6 and 22:65). This means that different religions were given to different nations and Islam was meant as a religion for the Arab people - or Muslim Arabs - only, and not for the entire Human Race. Therefore, on the evidence of the Quran itself, the belief that Islam is a World Religion is an error and contrary to Divine Law.

And yet this is precisely what many followers of Islam maintain. For example, it is written, "Wage war on the unbelievers that dwell around you" and "Fight the unbelievers to the end until the whole World belongs to God" (8:39). This is interpreted to mean that the World must be converted to Islam by any means. However, a more careful reading will show that this is not, indeed cannot be, the case.

The World already belongs to God since He created it. No human action can make it belong to God any more than it already does. It follows that the only possible meaning of the phrase is "until the World is ruled by believers as opposed to non-believers".

All we need to establish now is who is a believer. A believer is one who believes in God. The word "believer" therefore refers to a person's belief in God and not to his pertaining to a particular faith such as Islam. The believer can be a Jew, Christian, Hindu, Zoroastrian, Sikh or anybody who believes in God. Thus the Quran may arguably be cited in support of fighting atheists, communists and other non-believing persons but not those who believe in God.

This is evidenced by the following Quranic verse: "Believers and Jews and Christians and Sabians and anyone who believes in God and does good, has nothing to fear nor to regret" (5:69). In conjunction with other verses (quoted above) to the effect that there should be no dispute over the practices of different faiths, it becomes evident that the Quran does not regard Islam as the only true religion or as a religion that ought to dominate (or even exterminate) others. To believe otherwise, as is advocated by certain extremist elements, is evidently an error.

Had God wanted the World to be ruled by Islam, He would have accomplished this long ago. But He hasn't. This suggests that He is quite happy with people's following various faiths as long as they act in accord with Divine Law (Dharma).

Moreover, there is no evidence that Islamic countries like Saudi Arabia, Iran or Pakistan are in any way superior to their non-Islamic neighbours. People in Islamic Pakistan, for example, are not more law-abiding, more prosperous, more intelligent, more compassionate, healthier or better-looking than those in Hindu India or Buddhist Thailand, so exactly what difference or improvement has Islam been able to achieve?

If it is objected that Islamic countries are not yet truly Islamic but will one day become model nations if they adhere to Islam more strictly, then our reply or counter-objection is, if Islamic rule has been unable to create a perfect society in Saudi Arabia, the homeland of Islam, even after 1,400 years, how can we expect this to happen in the future?

How many millennia does Islam require to turn a small population like that of Saudi Arabia (about 10 million people) into perfect Muslims, and how many millions of years will it take to accomplish this in all countries of the World?

If a democratically-elected ruling political party failed to deliver what it promised even after a few years in office, it would justly be considered to have failed. The same must logically apply to any religion which has patently failed to deliver even after coming to power millenia ago, surely!

Such errors therefore come into being as a result of human ignorance. Scripture may be given by God, but as it is written down (often over long periods of time) by man, there is no proof or guarantee that it represents an exact transmission of God's Word. We cannot even know whether a particular Scripture is definitely the work of God because there is no conclusive evidence: we have not seen God writing or dictating Scripture.

What is evident is that some Scriptures are at least partly the work of man. Even if every Scripture were an exact record of God's Word, it would still be open to human interpretation. It follows that no guarantee as to the accuracy of Scripture or its interpretation is possible through ordinary means of investigation. This leads to misunderstandings and errors.

One error leads to another. Errors that are not recognised and adequately redressed generate further errors and lead to ignorance, misunderstanding, conflict and suffering which is the exact opposite of what Scripture intended!

The following case will suffice to prove our point. Western religions such as Christianity and Islam, began their existence as obscure Middle-Eastern cults founded by controversial figures. They were then imposed

on the Western World partly through missionary work but mainly by military force. One would have expected Westerners to have learned a lesson from history. Unfortunately, this clearly isn't the case.

The Western World continues to impose on the rest of Humanity its own redundant beliefs and practices which have largely failed the test of time: some two thousand years of Western culture have culminated in the Turkish Massacre of the Armenian population, two devastating World Wars, the Holocaust, Hiroshima, Vietnam, Tibet and many other unspeakable atrocities. The main victims of this cultural and religious imperialism today are Africa, India (including Tibet and Nepal) and South America.

This systematic perpetuation of defective (or pathological) beliefs explains the current rise in materialism, selfishness, confusion, violence, mental disorder, disease and natural disasters in the World. All this is not due to negligence or ill-will on the part of God but is entirely the product of human error for which man himself is responsible.

The World is the Creation of God, the Supreme Spirit. It is therefore a Spiritual place where life must be lived in accordance with Spiritual Laws. When these Laws are ignored, the result is chaos, confusion, ignorance and suffering.

Material measures to improve the World are doomed to fail because the causes of wars, poverty, disease and suffering are not material but Spiritual. To believe that the problems of the World can be solved without a Spiritual solution, is a serious error. The World is in the present state because it lives in error. Because most religious, philosophical and political systems contain fundamental errors, they are incapable of solving the World's problems.

Yoga is unique among World Faiths in that it possesses an inner mechanism whereby all errors are immediately identified and amended. This mechanism is called Meditation or Enquiry into Truth. It is an activity or state of consciousness whereby man detaches himself from his body and mind and establishes direct contact with God.

The Ancient Scriptures of India define Meditation as that whereby Yogis see or perceive reality. It results in higher, Yogic Perception (Yogi Pratyaksha) which is undisturbed by any beliefs or mental processes.

This direct contact with Truth is what other religions call "seeing God face to face", "seeing the Light", etc. For this reason, Enlightened Yogis are called Rishis (God Seers). The testimony of Enlightened Yogis is Mankind's unmatched means of knowing the Truth.

Yoga, therefore, is in a unique position to guide the followers of other faiths so that they realise the truth of their own Scriptures.

Yoga enables the followers of Islam to realise the Oneness of God and how to live a life in true Unity with Him and other faiths; it enables the followers of Christianity to realise the Light of God within themselves; it enables the followers of Judaism to realise the true Law of God and its correct application; it enables Hindus and Sikhs to attain Unity with God; and it enables Buddhists to discover the Ultimate Truth.

In consequence, Yoga is a God-given unifying Bridge ("yoga" literally means unity) that brings all religions together and brings out the best in every religion that each and every faith may contribute to the establishment of the true Kingdom of God on Earth, that is, a World illumined and guided by a Higher Truth in the light of which all creatures may live in peace, unity and happiness for all time.

The Path to Unity with Truth

The following are the main Teachings of Yoga (the Path of Unity with the Supreme) which all Spiritual aspirants - irrespective of religious denomination - must be aware of in order to understand the true meaning of life:

1. There is One Supreme Being (Shiva or God) Whose Essence is Pure Goodness.
2. Though being Eternally One, the Supreme Being manifests Himself in many ways.
3. All things are created by the Supreme Being out of Himself and to Him they ultimately return.
4. All things have an Inner Soul who is essentially identical with the Supreme. ("Man's Soul is the light of God", say the Scriptures of the West.)
5. The Universe is governed by the Creator through His Supreme Eternal Law (Sanatana Dharma).
6. Salvation, Freedom from Suffering and True Happiness are attained by adhering to Divine Law (Dharma).
7. Supreme Salvation is attained when a Soul becomes God-like (Shiva-sama), that is, Good and Wise like God, and as a result experiences Unity with the Supreme.

Becoming God-like - or "Isotheos", in the Greek language - was also the original teaching of Western Scriptures, which unfortunately has become lost in the official Church dogma.

8. The means of attaining Supreme Salvation are Spiritual Practice and the Grace of God.
9. The journey to Unity with the Supreme requires many lifetimes to complete. (The Bible similarly teaches that "no man can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again".)
10. The Practice of Yoga can shorten this Spiritual Journey to just one lifetime.
11. All living beings are responsible for their own actions and are capable of experiencing pleasure or pain as a result of such actions.
12. God shows Mankind the Path to Happiness and Freedom from Pain through Direct Revelation, Sacred Scriptures and the Teachings of Living Gurus.

A person who embraces, understands and correctly follows these twelve principles, qualifies as a follower of Yoga irrespective of his religious beliefs.

The purpose of Yoga is to create happiness for all through Spiritual means. In particular, it enables us to achieve the four main goals of life, which are: (1) Artha - Material Prosperity, (2) Kama - Love, (3) Dharma - Righteousness or Right Living and (4) Nirvana - Enlightenment.

In the light of this, we may easily understand why the founder of modern psychology, Carl G. Jung, famously declared that "Yoga offers undreamt-of possibilities"!

Yoga - the way to a better Future

As predicted in the ancient Scriptures of India, Mankind currently lives in Kali Yuga, the Age of Spiritual Ignorance, Materialism and Selfishness. It is a very dangerous time in which misguided human agency is upsetting the natural balance and order of the Planet with serious consequences for the entire human race.

This being so, the worldwide practice of Yoga to redress the current imbalance is not a choice but a *necessity* which must be urgently acknowledged and acted upon by all thinking people.

The Western World must give up the idea that it knows everything, or that it knows better, and humbly listen to the timeless Wisdom of the East. If it does so, it will understand that Yoga is a precious gift which man cannot afford to ignore or reject.

Therefore, it is the duty of all Spiritual people to spread the teachings of Yoga. By opening up to the Truth of Yoga we encourage others to do the same so that the World may be guided towards a better future for all.

Become a follower of Yoga

The essence of the Teachings of Yoga may be condensed into the following words: "Lord Shiva (the Supreme Principle of Goodness) is the Highest Truth and Yoga is the Path that leads to Him".

The uttering of these words constitutes a declaration of faith (shraddha) or formal acceptance of the Teachings of Yoga and the person who utters them becomes a follower of Yoga. Wherever he goes, he will be recognised as a Spiritual Soul and welcome into the Universal Yoga Community (or Brotherhood of Unity).

To further one's Spiritual Knowledge, it is advisable to study the Holy Scriptures of Yoga such as Shiva Rahasya, Shiva Purana, the Upanishads and the Vedas. Those who wish to learn more about the Higher Mysteries of Yoga, may receive initiation by a qualified Yoga Teacher or Master who has studied and is able to explain the above Scriptures.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 26

CASTE AND PREJUDICE

QUESTION: Does Yoga believe in the Indian Caste System?

ANSWER: The Caste System is one of the most misunderstood elements of Indian culture. To correctly understand what the Caste System is we need to understand the true meaning of the word "caste".

First of all, caste or social class is not a matter of religious belief but a fact. The scientific study of human society shows that any group of people the members of which engage in different occupations or fulfil different functions within that group, is capable of being analysed into subgroups or classes according to position or function.

The Origin of Class

In primitive societies, where people lead a very basic form of life, every individual can easily acquire all the necessary skills that he may need in his day-to-day existence. In such a society, individuals cannot be distinguished from the others or classified by their occupation. In societies that are more technologically advanced, however, the professional specialisation of individuals and their resultant classification into social groups or classes cannot be avoided.

Indeed, the division of society according to professional occupation is an universal phenomenon that may be observed in most cultures, both ancient and modern. In Europe, for example, society has been traditionally classified into the upper, middle and working classes, the upper class being the class that rules the country (aristocracy), the middle class being professional and business workers, and the working or producing class proper being those that are employed for wages such as industrial and agricultural workers and servants.

Even in Communist dictatorships such as Russia and China, all attempts to abolish social classes ended in complete failure. The systematic murder of millions of upper- and middle-class people by the Communist authorities only led to their being replaced by a new ruling class, namely, the very people who had sought to abolish the class system! To take another example, in the 18th century French Revolution, the commoners abolished the Monarchy only to replace it with a military dictatorship under the rule of Napoleon - who promptly declared himself Emperor and proceeded to create his own court and nobility.

What becomes evident is that in every society, various sections of the population are engaged in specific activities that are necessary for the survival and prosperity of the entire community. Any attempt to abolish such classes can only create a worse situation than before. This applies to India as much as to any other human society on Earth.

The main difference between India and the rest of the World is this that, while it is fashionable among many nations to pretend that no social classes exist, Indian people prefer to be honest about it and accept it as a fact of life.

The main classification of society in India has been into four social groups called "Chatur Varna": Priests, Warriors, Farmers and Servants.

(1) The duty of the Priestly Class (Brahmana) was to preserve the cultural and religious heritage and ensure the moral and Spiritual well-being of the nation. (2) The Warrior Class (Kshatrya) was responsible for the protection of the country. (3) Farmers (Vaishya) were engaged in agriculture and cattle-rearing. Being the main producers as well as owners of cattle (which had the function of currency), they also engaged in trade. (4) The Shudras were people who did not own land and were therefore unable to support themselves. As a result, they had to find employment in the service of the other three classes.

What becomes apparent is that the above division of society was established on the basis of occupational classes that had emerged quite naturally as a result of man's interaction with his environment and fellow humans. To properly understand this fact we only need to imagine what would happen if all human beings on Earth were politicians or lawyers. A little reflection will show that it is neither possible nor desirable for all of Mankind to engage in the same occupation. This is why, even in the animal kingdom, creatures living in complex societies such as ants and bees, are organised into certain classes according to their specific function.

The Quest for the Ideal Social Order

It is important to understand that there is a difference between Social Class or Class System and discrimination against individuals or groups on the grounds of Social Class. Is it universally accepted that such discrimination is morally and Spiritually wrong.

Class in itself, on the other hand, is an inherent factor to human society. Whether we like it or not, the division of society into functional classes is an unavoidable fact of life. The only point that remains to be established is what is **the best classification of society** so that its functioning is optimised and discrimination and other malfunctioning minimised. The traditional Indian system of Chatur Varna is, no doubt, one of the best. However, it has not always been implemented in the best possible way.

For example, the Warrior Class (Kshatrya) was ment to protect the nation as well as function as rulers, which is why it was also call Rajanya (Ruling Class). In practice, however, society was often ruled indirectly by the Priestly Class (Brahmana). Moreover, while other Classes were prohibited from taking up other occupations, the Brahmanas reserved the right to engage in activities outside their normal priestly functions.

In addition to this, the wealth accumulated by landowners and merchants (Vaishya) enabled them to command a degree of influence far beyond their conventional position. Over the centuries, the balance of power became dangerously upset. The Brahmanas, Kshatryas and Vaishyas began to compete with each other for power, neglecting in the process their original duties. As a result, the Brahmanas failed to preserve the cultural and Spiritual heritage of the people. The Kshatryas failed to adequately protect the nation against invasions by foreign powers. The Vaishyas failed to invest their wealth in projects for the upholding of the traditional moral and social values, and chose to side up with the new rulers. Abandoned and neglected by the upper classes, the Shudras often joined the invading enemies against their former rulers, in a desperate attempt to escape discrimination and oppression. Interestingly, conversion to other faiths such as Islam failed to improve the situation of the masses. On the contrary, converted areas like Pakistan and Bangladesh are far behind Hindu India in their cultural and economic development.

Even so, the fact remains that almost half of the territory of Ancient India is currently under foreign occupation while the remaining half is in imminent danger of disintegration. In normal circumstances, no power in the World could reduce a nation of the size and greatness of India to her present state. The reason why this deplorable situation came about against all expectations, is that the Caste System was illegally used as a tool for creating division in a blatant breach of its original purpose of creating unity and harmony in society.

For this reason, some Ancient Scriptures (Puranas) maintain that in the current World Age (Kali Yuga, the Age of Darkness), Kshatryas and Vaishyas no longer exist. Indeed, by the 17th century, the general opinion was that only two Classes remained in existence, the Brahmanas and the Shudras, that is, landed clergy and landless servants.

Nor must we believe that such developments are in any way unique to India. All nations on Earth have undergone periods of social unrest in which power was taken over by one class to the detriment of other classes. For example, in Ancient Rome, power was largely held by the Military (Warrior Class). Medieval Europe was under the rule of the Priestly Class - as are many Islamic countries today. Modern America and Britain are ruled by the Merchant Class.

In all these cases, one section of the population acquires power at the expense of others. For example, in the West, the rise of the Merchant Class has generated considerable wealth for many. The Farming Class however, has suffered. So has the Priestly Class. Greater wealth has contributed to growing materialism and declining Spirituality. People's main concern in life is to earn more money and buy more goods. Although they have more possessions than ever before, true happiness remains as elusive as ever. In the

Middle Ages, serfs were slaves to the landowners. Today, consumers are slaves to their own greed and to the Merchant Class who is exploiting their Spiritual ignorance and weakness.

What becomes evident is that the issue is not social classes as such - which we have shown to be both natural and necessary - but **the proper maintenance of the balance of power** between the classes.

The Yogic View

We have demonstrated that the Indian Four-Class System, (Chatur Varna) though perfectly valid in ideal situations, has largely failed to fulfil its designated function. This does not mean to say that it is fundamentally flawed. It is merely in need of adjustment.

The tenth Book (19:12) of the Rig Veda mentions four castes issuing from the Creator as Priests, Warriors, Farmers and Servants. However, there is no intrinsic necessity for any society to be classified into four groups. Indeed, Indian society itself has long recognised that the four-class system was inadequate and created a Fifth Class (Panchama), comprising those that are excluded from the other four.

The fact is that the fourfold division belongs to the Brahmanic tradition of "Four-Headed" God Brahma, whereas Yoga follows the tradition of "Five-Headed" Lord Shiva.

In the Yoga Tradition, the Supreme Lord is said to have Five Faces that illumine the World. Four of these are directed to the four cardinal points, east, south, west and north, while the fifth faces upwards to the Sky. The Puranas also tell us that Brahma originally had five heads one of which was cut off by Lord Shiva Who holds the skull as a symbol of power over all other Gods.

This suggests two things: (1) that a conflict between the two traditions occurred at some point in history and (2) that the original stratification of society was five-layered, with Yogis (not Brahmanas) at the top. This is supported by the internal evidence of the Yoga Tradition (Yoga Dharma) itself where the Supreme Lord is called **Maha Yogi (Supreme Yogi)** and not Maha Brahmana (Supreme Priest).

Thus Yogis would represent the Head of the Creator, as they possess the highest knowledge; Priests represent God's Mouth or Voice, as their main function is to conduct prayers; Warriors are God's Arms, as they protect the nation; Merchants are the Legs since trade means movement of goods and people as well as material progress; Farmers are the Feet as farming produces the goods upon which society stands. The great reverence with which Yogis are regarded by all social classes even today, suggests that this was the original and correct division.

Indeed, Enlightened Yogis being highly advanced Souls are correctly held to be above the Four Castes that constitute the majority of Mankind. As for Merchants they may perfectly well engage in trade without belonging to any of the other classes. They therefore clearly constitute a class of their own. These facts make it necessary for two Classes, **Yogis** and **Merchants**, to be added to the Brahmanical system.

What about the Servant Class (Shudra)?

Servants are, by definition, people who have no occupation of their own but engage in such work as properly belongs to their employers' class. If a person is employed in guarding property or persons, for example, then he does the work of a Warrior and must be classified as such. Likewise, if he assists a Priest, Merchant or Farmer.

Also, if a low-born person (Servant) were to become wealthy through hard work and engage in agricultural or mercantile work for himself, we couldn't reasonably insist on calling him a Servant.

In consequence, the notion of a Servant Class is not only unreasonable but may actually prevent the social and economic progress of a large section of society, which can only lead to division, fragmentation and disintegration of the nation. Moreover, the creation of a separate Servant Class would cause people to forget the fact that ultimately all creatures are the servants of God and that our true purpose on Earth is to establish Unity and Harmony in obedience to Divine Will. Such a class is therefore contrary to the very principles of social cohesion and harmony which the Caste System is supposed to uphold, and must be rejected unconditionally.

As an inclusive faith, Yoga naturally rejects all discrimination on the grounds of social class. For the same reason, it rejects the notion of "Untouchables" or "Outcastes". The only exception to this is made in the case of lawfully excommunicated, exiled, or imprisoned criminals (such as terrorists) who are incapable of reformation. Such elements cannot be regarded as part of human society, being declared enemies of the people.

Conclusion

In a World where the greater part of Mankind subsists on agriculture, **Farming** is needed to produce food and feed the population. **Trading** is necessary for the exchange of goods. **Armed Forces** are needed to maintain inner order, prevent crime and defend the nation against external attack. **Guidance** in religious matters is necessary for social and moral order. **Spiritual Guidance** such as Yogic teachings are necessary for the psychological and Spiritual well-being of all. This corresponds to the **Five Social Classes** we enumerated earlier: **Farmers, Merchants, Warriors, Priests and Yogis**.

All other specialised professions involving construction work, medical treatment, legal assistance, etc., are needed only occasionally and sometimes not at all, whereas the above mentioned five are permanent constituents of all human society. Together they represent the five fingers of the Hand of God whereby Divine Order is established on Earth for the benefit of all.

As long as these Five Classes (Pancha Varna) and their mutual co-operation and harmony are preserved, Mankind will prosper and all will be well. By contrast, if a nation were relying too much on trade, for example, she will tend to exploit others in order to obtain tradeable goods. If a nation were relying too much on offering services instead of producing goods, she will become dependent on others' buying the services, and so on.

A society structured on Yogic principles will no longer need political debate, making the entire political class dispensable; due to lack of internal conflict and crime, it will render the police forces and the legal profession unnecessary; the health-conscious lifestyle of its citizens will reduce the need of medical care to a minimum. These are just a few examples of the extraordinary potential a Yoga-based society has for creating an ideal World. It is not for nothing that the father of Western Psychology, Professor Carl G. Jung, famously declared that "Yoga offers undreamed-of possibilities".

Yogis, therefore, must be admitted to constitute the highest social class which is needed to bring coherence, unity and harmony to any community as well as to establish and uphold a conscious link between human society and a Higher Truth. The proof for this is provided by countries where Yoga is either unknown or suppressed on political or religious grounds. In such countries, materialism, atheism, alcoholism, drug-abuse, mental imbalance and crime as well as political and religious extremism and terrorism become more and more prominent and various measures are constantly introduced to redress the resultant general disorder - usually with dubious results.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 27

THE THIRTY-SIX REALITIES (TATTVAS)

QUESTION: What are the Tattvas and how many are they?

ANSWER: The Sanskrit word "Tattva" means Truth, Reality or True Essence - from "tad", that which is. Strictly speaking, there is only One Reality. That Reality is God, the Supreme Being and Highest Truth, the **Para Tattva**. This is the original teaching of all true Scriptures.

If this teaching were adhered to by all, Mankind would live in unity and harmony for ever. However, there is a small problem, namely, the World or, rather, man's misunderstanding thereof. It is this human misunderstanding that creates all the problems in the World.

There are two general attitudes towards the World. Some reject its existence and concern themselves exclusively with their own beliefs about God, while others engross themselves in the World and forget about God.

Yoga teaches that both attitudes are wrong. As long as we live in the physical World we cannot deny its existence. Similarly, as God is the Ground of everything, we cannot ignore Him.

In His Infinite Wisdom and Compassion, the Supreme Lord Himself helps us through the Eternal Teachings of Yoga to properly relate to both the World and God. Thus Yoga teaches us that although the World appears to consist of seemingly distinct and unrelated things, the fact is that they all have one ultimate source. Indeed, the Universe is nothing but a manifestation of the Supreme Spirit.

In the same way as the clear, blue Sky produces clouds, which produce rain, which can turn into solid ice, so also, immaterial Spirit produces increasingly solid or material, forms of life.

The entire Universe consists of various manifestations of God (the Universal Consciousness) which together form the basis of all our experiences. As these are just forms of the Ultimate Reality, they are themselves called Primary Realities, Principles or Categories of Existence. In short, **Tattvas**.

God - the Source and Origin of all things

In the Rudra Samhita of Shiva Purana, Lord Shiva declares: "I am the Supreme Being, the Ever Existing, the Infinite, the Perfect, the Pure One. Being, Consciousness and Bliss are My characteristics. Verily, I am Ever One, Undivided and Unmanifest."

Yet He also says, "I am both Without Form and With Form. I am the Author of Creation, Preservation and Dissolution".

The Supreme Lord then explains how Creation is brought about: "For the purpose of Creation, Preservation and Dissolution, I manifest Myself as Creator, Preserver, Dissolver."

As a piece of gold fashioned into an ornament does not cease to be gold, so the World is just different names and forms of the same substance. As clay and objects made of it are different in name, form and function, but not in substance, so all things are in reality made of the same one stuff.

God (the Supreme Intelligence), therefore, must be seen as the basic material of all things. His Pure, Unseen, Unmanifest Aspect which is Truth, Supreme Knowledge, Infinite, is the Root of all things. That must be realised and meditated upon as the Highest Truth.

The Universe as an Emanation of the Divine

In the same way as a dreaming man fashions a whole World out of his own thoughts, God creates the World out of His Own Infinite Intelligence. Thus the Universe is an Emanation or Projection of the Divine. Says the Shiva Purana: "God sees all this within Himself".

When Shiva, the Universal Consciousness or Supreme Intelligence looks outwards, as it were, he projects the Universe out of Himself. When Shiva looks inwards, the Universal Projection is withdrawn back into Himself and He perceives nothing but His Undifferentiated, Unmanifest Infinite Self. These activities of Emanation and Retraction are known as Opening (Unmesha) and Closing (Nimesha), respectively, of the Divine Eyes.

In consequence, the Tattvas, which are the Primary Realities or Principles which constitute the World, are nothing but stages in the Process of Emanation or Unfolding of the Universal Consciousness (Parama Samvid).

The Ancient Scriptures of India analyse the Process of Universal Emanation into thirty-six main stages or phases which are briefly described as follows.

1. Shiva-Tattva: As the Universe is the creation of God's Own Mind (the Supreme Intelligence), the first Reality or Tattva naturally is God (Shiva) Himself. This level of Reality consists of Pure, Infinite Consciousness.

2. Shakti-Tattva: The second level of Reality is that of Pure, Infinite Bliss which is the Power whereby God experiences the Boundless Joy of His Own Existence. For this reason it is known as Shakti-Tattva, the Principle or Category of Power.

3. Sadashiva-Tattva: The third level is that of Pure, Infinite Will-Power, being the Power whereby God experiences Himself as an Unlimited, Independent Force that is ready and able to perform any action He wishes. At this stage God forms the resolve to bring His Power of Creation into operation.

4. Ishvara-Tattva: The fourth level represents God's Power of Pure, Infinite Knowledge whereby He is able to know all things. At this stage God begins to conceive in His Mind the Universe to be created.

5. Satvidya-Tattva: The fifth level is that of Pure, Infinite Action. At this stage, the Divine Power of Action which is the Power whereby God may assume, or manifest Himself as, any form or shape, comes into operation.

Up to and including this stage, Creation is Ideal in the sense that it is very much one with the Mind of God just as a thought or idea is one with the mind of the person who conceives it. The Universe at this level is purely Spiritual and is inhabited by Spiritual Beings such as Gods (Angels), Enlightened Yogis (Siddhas), Sages (Rishis) and Saints (Sadhus) who are consciously aware of their Oneness with their Creator.

These evolved Souls are beings of great Spiritual power. Although they may assume any form and shape they wish, they have no bodies but may be described as radiant Orbs of Spirit for which reason they are known as Devas or Devatas (Radiant Ones).

6. Maya-Tattva: This is God's Wondrous Power, that aspect of His Power of Action, whereby He performs the Miracle of Physical Creation. For this reason it is called the Magic Power of God or **Maya Shakti**.

At this stage something extraordinary happens. Just as the Sun is sometimes obscured by an eclipse or by a mist or cloud which conceals his radiant orb from human view, God's Infinite, Independent and Free

Consciousness appears to become obscured by a layer of dense and opaque Consciousness. This dark veil of Consciousness provides the substance from which the Material Universe is created.

Thus, as the Sun envelops himself in clouds which produce rain which nourishes different forms of life, so also God obscures His Own Infinite Majesty and Glory and appears as, or manifests, the Material Universe teeming with innumerable forms of limited life.

Just as the Sun hides himself from human view by night in order to reveal the Stars and the Moon, so also God conceals His Highest Glory so that man may see the wonders of His Creation and understand the true Power of God.

7. Kalaa-Tattva: Due to God's Power of Obscuration His Five Divine Powers (Consciousness, Bliss, Will-Power, Knowledge and Action) assume limited forms giving rise to the first stage in limited creation, called Kalaa-Tattva. It represents the limited power of action whereby an embodied being is able to accomplish but a few things.

8. Vidya-Tattva: This is the stage at which the power of knowledge associated with a sentient creature is limited so that he can only know a few things.

9. Raaga-Tattva: At this stage a living being's will-power becomes limited so that he only desires limited things.

10. Kaala-Tattva: This is that stage at which a Soul's unlimited and uninterrupted happiness becomes temporary and limited. This temporariness gives rise to the experience of limited time.

11. Niyati-Tattva: This is the stage at which the Soul's consciousness becomes so limited as for him to have only a limited experience of himself.

12. Purusha-Tattva: This is the crucial point at which Consciousness, having become limited, comes into existence as an embodied Soul, complete with the above mentioned limited powers of consciousness, happiness, will, knowledge and action. Hence it is known as Purusha or personal Soul.

13. Pradhana-Tattva: Also known as Prakrti, it represents that aspect of the Soul which, following the limitation of his consciousness, becomes unconscious and forms the Soul's first objective experience. For this reason it is called Pradhana or Primary Matter from which all objective experience arises.

Pradhana consists of the three qualities (Gunas) of Light (Sattva), Darkness (Tamas) and Activity (Rajas), the last-named being the interaction of the first two. They are experienced as pleasure, insentience and pain, respectively and together represent the sum total of the Soul's future experiences such as thoughts, emotions and sense perceptions, resting within himself in potential form.

Pradhana corresponds to what Western psychology terms a person's "unconscious". While every Soul has his own Pradhana (or Unconscious), the Collective Unconscious is nothing but the Mind of God which is unknown and therefore "unconscious" to the personal Soul.

14. Buddhi-Tattva: This is the first product of Pradhana, formed from its light-aspect (Sattva), in which both Soul and his experiences reflect themselves as in a mirror, resulting in thought processes. In everyday life, Buddhi constitutes a Soul's Intellect or Power of Reasoning whereby he analyses his experiences and forms a judgement in respect of the same.

15. Ahamkara-Tattva: The offshoot of Buddhi-Tattva, it represents the Power of Personality or Identity whereby the Soul creates or builds a sense of Identity for himself out of sense perceptions, emotions, thoughts and memories. Hence it is called Ahamkara or "I-maker".

16. Manas-Tattva: The Lower Mind (as opposed to the Intellect or Higher Mind) whereby the Soul selects sense perceptions out of the general sense data, builds them into intelligible images, names and classifies them and presents them to the higher levels of the mind for further processing.

For the sake of convenience, the remaining 20 Tattvas are dealt with in groups of five.

Tattvas 17 to 21. The Five Faculties of Perception (Jnanendriyas): Hearing, Feeling by Touch, Seeing, Tasting and Smelling are the Soul's Powers of Perceptual Knowledge and extensions of the Lower Mind, whereby the Soul experiences the multitude of sense perceptions that constitute the external World.

Tattvas 22 to 26. The Five Faculties of Action (Karmendriyas): Speaking, Grasping, Moving About, Excreting and Sexual Activities are the Soul's Powers of responding to and interacting with, the external World.

Tattvas 27 to 31. The Five Primary Sensations (Tanmatras): Sound, Touch, Colour, Flavour and Odour constitute the Soul's sense data that together form his external experiences.

Tattvas 32 to 36. The Five Gross Elements of Matter (Maha Bhutas): Ether, Air, Fire, Water and Earth are condensations of the above described Primary Sensations. They represent the constituent forces that in various combinations make up the material substance of which physical objects are made.

For example, that which gives solidity to an object, belongs to the Earth-Tattva. That which gives fluidity belongs to the Water-Tattva. That which gives form and shape belongs to Fire. That which gives movement belongs to Air. And that which gives location and extension in space (i.e., size, direction, etc.) belongs to Ether.

Due to variation in their materiality or subtlety, the Gross Tattvas are perceived variously. Earth is perceived by its qualities of odour, taste, colour, feel and sound; Water by its qualities of taste, colour, feel and sound; Fire by its qualities of colour, feel and sound; Air by its qualities of feel and sound; and Ether, being the most subtle, is perceived by its quality of sound, only.

What becomes evident from the above is that the Tattvas are defined by their exclusive capacity to perform a specific function in the scheme of reality. And as the sole agent or acting force is Consciousness, it follows that the Tattvas are nothing but functions of Consciousness.

Thus the whole Universe is made of Spiritual Intelligence in various degrees of crystallization or condensation. In the human body, this Intelligence lies dormant in the form of **Kundalini Shakti**, the "Serpent Power" which can be awakened through Spiritual Knowledge, Yogic Postures, Meditation or simply through the grace of an Enlightened Master. When awakened, Kundalini rises upwards, like a roused cobra, and elevates man's consciousness to its original state of wisdom and power.

The Throne of Heaven

In the same way as Intelligence can descend from the highest elevation of Divine Consciousness to the lowest, it can also ascend from the lowest to the highest.

Western Scriptures speak of the six steps leading to the Throne of God, the Seven Heavens, etc. All this is very mysterious until we analyse these scattered fragments of information from a Yogic Perspective.

There are seven levels of Intelligence, from the dormant one present in "inanimate" objects to the fully awakened one of Enlightened Beings. These levels of Intelligence may be accessed and experienced through the stimulation of certain energy-centres in the human body, known as **Chakras**.

The "opening" of the Chakras represents the awakening of particular levels of Consciousness or the unlocking of the Soul's capacities of experience.

The first six Chakras correspond to the six levels of Universal Manifestation consisting of five Tattvas (Universal Principles) each. These are the six steps leading to the Throne of Heaven. The seventh and highest Chakra is the level of Divinity consisting of the Five Divine Powers through the awakening of which man becomes once again Divine. This is the Throne of God or Supreme State (Parama Avasthaa) which renders the Yogi who is firmly established in it, one with the Supreme, the thirty-sixth and Highest Reality.

For this reason, knowledge of the 36 Realities (Tattva-Jnana) is Knowledge of Ultimate Reality Itself, that is, the Highest Knowledge. This Knowledge contains everything that is worthy to be known. Nothing can be known besides this because nothing else exists. This clearly establishes the supremacy of Yoga over all other faiths.

How many Tattvas?

It is sometimes objected that the Yoga Sutra, the primary text of "Classical Yoga" dating to about 180 BC, only mentions 25 Tattvas, the highest being Purusha.

This may be so. However, "Classical Yoga" is not the only form of Yoga. There are plenty of other Yogic texts which do mention 36 Tattvas. Yoga is a vast body of knowledge that cannot be reasonably restricted to one text!

Moreover, mention of some Tattvas does not exclude the existence of others. Some traditions speak of four, seven or nine Tattvas. The second book of the Vayaviya Samhita of Shiva Purana, for example, mentions three Tattvas: "Shiva, Vidya and Atma are the three Tattvas. From Shiva came out the Vidya and from Vidya the Atma" (20:27).

It may be inferred from this that there are only three Tattvas. The matter becomes clear, however, when we understand that "tattva" literally means "reality" and a reality is quite capable of containing other realities. Indeed, as explained in the Siddhanta-Saravali and other works, "Shiva" comprises the Shiva-Tattva and Shakti-Tattva; "Vidya" comprises the Tattvas from Sadashiva to Satvidya; and "Atma" comprises the Tattvas from Maya to Earth. This gives a total of thirty-six, which is the generally accepted number in the tradition of Shiva.

It may be that the Yoga Sutra was explaining things in terms of Samkhya teachings, a tradition that was fashionable in that period of Indian history and which appeared to advocate Purusha as the highest Reality or Tattva.

However, the Yoga Sutra itself mentions Ishvara (Shiva or God), a Higher Being above Purusha who is to be worshipped for the purpose of Salvation. This provides ample scope for the admission of intermediary Tattvas, which may well be comprised in the Tattvas Purusha (Soul) and Ishvara (Shiva). After all, the additional Tattvas that distinguish the Shiva tradition from the Samkhya are nothing but the five powers of the Soul and the five powers of the Supreme Being. If in addition to this we count the Supreme Being Himself (Shiva Tattva) as the Reality above all others, we get thirty-six Tattvas.

Shiva Agama vs. Yoga Sutra

The main difference that sets apart some Scriptures from others is that some are externalist in their approach to reality and others are internalist. Externalist Scriptures like the Yoga Sutra follow schools of thought such as Samkhya which seek to explain reality in terms of the outer layers of Consciousness (the Tattvas from Earth to Purusha).

Scriptures like the Shiva Sutra, on the other hand, belong to the Tradition of Shiva (Shiva Agama) which describes reality mainly in terms of the innermost aspects of Consciousness (Tattvas from Maya and the Kanchukas to Shiva Himself). They are, therefore, internalist and represent a higher level of Spiritual instruction.

While the Yoga Sutra constitutes a valuable introduction to Yogic teachings, the higher truths of Yoga are to be found in Shiva Agama which is the true origin of Yoga. We have thus demonstrated that the Holy Scriptures of India are not mutually contradictory but complementary, those belonging to the Shiva Agama tradition being the highest as they concern themselves with the highest aspects of Reality.

What is important to understand is that Yogic texts like the Yoga Sutra are not novels but extremely concise works that often barely outline a Spiritual concept which needs to be elaborated by a qualified Master and substantiated by practice and direct experience.

Even if we were to accept, for the sake of argument, that "Classical Yoga" only taught the existence of 25 Tattvas, there would be no harm. If a person somehow manages to elevate himself to the level of pure intelligence of the Soul, he will necessarily become enlightened enough to progress further of his own accord - and with the help of Ishvara!

Thus he will of necessity meet a Higher Reality face to face even if he started on his journey by doubting or even denying the existence of such Reality. We must not forget that Spiritual Practice is a force that carries the practiser higher and higher until the final Goal has been reached, irrespective of the point of departure.

It is not for nothing that the Scriptures themselves declare Samkhya and Yoga to be one and the same. Any teaching to the contrary must be rejected as contrary to the Universal Law of Unity (Yoga Dharma).

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 28

THE TRUE CHRIST

QUESTION: What is the Yogic view of Christ?

ANSWER: In order to find a satisfactory answer to this complex question we must first establish what is meant by "Christ".

There are a number of possibilities of which we may indicate the following four. The word "Christ" may mean a) the historical Jesus Christ as he was in reality, b) the Christ as described in the Gospels, c) the beliefs people hold about him or d) the Christ people referred to before the appearance of the biblical figure known by that name.

If the question implies meaning **a**, it can only be answered by those who lived in those times and personally knew him. If **b**, a distinction must be drawn between what people believe Gospel says and what it actually does say. If **c**, there are too many different and contradictory beliefs about him, therefore we can only consider a few. If **d**, it is hoped that an answer will emerge as we proceed with our discussion.

Was Jesus Christ the Son of God?

One of the central teachings to the Christian faith is that Jesus was the one and only son of God. To begin with, the notion of a unique son of God is contradicted by biblical references to "sons of God". For example, "the sons of God saw the daughters of man and took them as wives" (Genesis 6:2).

The latter portion of the Bible, the so-called "New Testament", does describe Jesus as "the son of God". However, such statements do not stem from his direct disciples but from the saints Mark, Matthew, Luke and John who composed the four Gospels of the New Testament on the basis of oral tradition or hearsay.

It is not known by what means the authors of the Gospels or their sources were able to ascertain beyond reasonable doubt that Jesus was the son of God. A safer way to establish the truth of the matter, therefore, is to see what Jesus himself had to say on this subject.

The following points emerge upon the objective investigation of the Gospel text.

Jesus refers to himself as "son of God" just once. In certain circumstances, there would be some justification in regarding this as "proof". As we shall presently demonstrate, however, this is not the case in this instance.

The affirmation "I am" is not a direct statement but comes in the form of an answer to the question "Are you the Christ, the son of the Blessed?"; it is spoken under interrogation by the high priest; it is made outside the reach of the people in the street; it is qualified by the following sentence: "and you shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power" etc.; finally, it is found in only one of the four Gospels (Gospel of Mark);

Had this been central to Jesus's teachings we may reasonably expect him to have declared it more often, more openly and more vigourously. Far from this being the case, he repeatedly denies it in the other Gospels. How can the Church explain away the fact that of all four Gospels describing the same scene, in three Jesus denies being the Son of God but in one he confirms it?

In any court of law, if one witness were contradicted by three others, he wouldn't stand much of a chance of being believed. In the final analysis, therefore, it appears doubtful that the title "son of God" was ever actually claimed by Jesus himself.

What appears to have been the case is that this title was accorded to Jesus by others while he himself at the most tolerated this belief and even rejected it on various occasions.

Another important point which is often conveniently overlooked by some is the question as to the exact meaning of the term "son of God" as understood by Jesus himself.

It is clear that Jesus never taught that he was the son of God in the sense attributed to the term by the Church authorities. So, when he heard his followers call him by that name, what exactly did it mean to him personally?

This becomes crystal clear from verse 34, chapter 10, of the Gospel after St. John. On being confronted on this issue, Jesus says: "It is written in your Law, **You are Gods and all of you are children of the most High**".

What becomes evident is that Jesus did not regard the title "son of God" as belonging to him exclusively but to all human beings! Indeed, it is written in the older portion of the Bible, the so-called "Old Testament" or "Jewish Law", "I have said you are Gods; and all of you are children of the most High" (Psalms 82:6). And, as Jesus comments, "Scripture cannot be broken".

Had he considered himself as the "one and only son of God" as many Christians claim, he would have found a more personal interpretation or explanation to this term instead of one of general application.

Moreover, in the very same Gospels, Jesus refers to himself as **"Son of man"** not just once but about eighty times! Yet this teaching is systematically ignored by believers and Church alike and persistently replaced with the unsubstantiated son-of-God theory.

On the evidence of this we may safely conclude that Jesus was not the son of God except in the general sense that we all, as the creation of God, are God's children.

Was Jesus a pacifist?

The belief that Jesus was a pacifist is founded upon the so-called Sermon on the Mount, a public speech in which he told his followers to "love their enemy", "turn the other cheek" and "not resist evil".

The main problem with this is that if carried to its logical conclusion, such advice would result in a World ruled by evil men who would impose their tyranny on peace-loving people. This clearly is repugnant to all human sense of Justice. It is difficult to reconcile such a teaching with the title "Son of Justice" which the Church accords to Jesus.

Moreover, how are we to reconcile Jesus's perceived pacifism with his other teachings such as: "Think not that I have come to bring peace on Earth; it is not peace I have come to bring but a sword" (Matthew 10:34).

"I have not come to bring peace but division. For henceforth the father shall be divided against the son and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter and the daughter against the mother" (Luke 12:51-53).

"If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). "He that is not with me is against me", "Bring my enemies here and slay them before me" (Luke 19:27). "He that has no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one" (Luke 22:36).

The Bible also narrates how Jesus overthrows the tables of traders who were selling merchandise in the temple and throws them out, how he drives demons out of possessed people, he resists the temptations of the devil, etc. In other words, he clearly engages in activities which stand in stark contrast to his own doctrine of non-violence or "not resisting evil".

So long as the Church authorities are unable or unwilling to come up with a credible explanation for these contradictions, we are naturally entitled to draw our own conclusions. What these are we shall presently explain.

In the Bible, Jesus tells his followers that they will hear of wars and rumours of wars but they should not be troubled as these things must happen. The wars he was talking about were without doubt the incidents known as the Jewish revolt against Roman rule (66-70 CE). This resulted in the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem and the deportation of the Jewish population to other parts of the Roman Empire.

Such was the end of the Jewish state which was practically wiped out and only partly restored in the 1940s. Today, its existence is once again in danger.

The question that naturally arises is, how was Jesus connected with these events. An important clue is provided by the name "Jesus of Nazareth". This appears to be an invention. Jesus was from Bethlehem and not Nazareth. The original Greek text has "Jesus the Nazarene (Nazoraion)" which may refer not to the locality of Nazareth but to the Nozrim (Nozrim ha-Brit), a group of Jewish fundamentalists who, like the Zealots and similar organisations, were opposed to Roman rule.

If Jesus belonged to such a group, which is not improbable given that he belonged to the royal line of King David, this would explain many of the Biblical passages which remain otherwise obscure. It also explains why Christians in the Middle East are known as "Nazarenes" or "Nozrim" even today. In any case, the internal evidence of the Bible suffices to refute the claim that Jesus was a pacifist or even a peace-fanatic.

The objection that may arise here is, if the Bible was a subversive document why does it appear to have a religious, rather than political, agenda?

The answer to this is that there were literally thousands of religious movements in those days - just as now. It would have been both easy and convenient for a resistance movement against Rome to be disguised as an inoffensive religious one. Nor was there much disguising necessary: the Nazarenes (Nozrim) were not only nationalists, they were in fact a religious sect the aim of which was to establish a world Jewish theocracy. If their writings appear to be religious it is because the Nazarenes (Nozrim) *were* religious.

While the followers of Jesus may have actually believed that their leader was the "son of God", openly calling him by such names would have deflected Roman attention from his true political and military role. Even the substitution of "Jesus of Nazareth" for "Jesus the Nazarene" may have been part of the same stratagem.

The fact is that no Jewish leader, religious or otherwise, could have remained uninvolved in the all-pervading revolutionary ferment that affected the Jewish society of the time.

In addition to this, there may have been divergent views regarding the royal lineage of the Kings of Israel which again would have resulted in political conflicts which Jesus as "inheritor to the throne of David", as the Bible calls him, could not have ignored or escaped. This would have further increased the risks to Jesus's person and provided additional motives for his activities to be disguised as a purely religious movement.

On the authority of the Bible itself, St Paul, one of the founding fathers of the Church, was identified as a "ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes/Nozrim", by Anani'as, the high priest of the Temple - a man who would have been in a position to know these things. (Acts 24:5). Historical evidence clearly shows that the Christian Church has been involved in politics from the very beginning. It is not without reason that Christians came to be persecuted by the authorities in Ancient Rome.

One of the standard methods of operation of the Church was as follows. Highly intelligent, educated missionaries who were trained in the art of political and religious debate, would gain the attention and favour of a king or tribal chief through gifts and promises of economic and military advantage. They would then persuade him to convert to Christianity and he in turn would order his subjects to do the same. Finally, the king was encouraged by his missionary advisers to start a war against neighbouring tribes and convert them to the new faith as a matter of religious duty.

This is how Rome under Emperor Constantine was converted by the early Church, the Romans converted the Franks, the Franks converted the Saxons, the Saxons converted the Scandinavians, the Spanish converted the South Americans, the Portuguese converted the Hindus, etc.

True believers have no doubt existed. Indeed, the vast majority of believers were simple and sincere people whose only fault was to allow themselves to be manipulated and used by the Church (especially the Vatican) for its own political and financial purposes. But this doesn't make Christianity or its methods right. Nor does it alter the fact that throughout history, the Christian Church has operated as a highly efficient and ruthless political, military and financial machine.

In the light of these facts the attribution of political motives to the authors of the official Bible cannot be regarded as entirely without foundation.

Thus in his analysis of the formation of Church teachings, Manfred Davidmann states that "What St Paul preached was the political ideology of an oppressive establishment which wanted to be able to oppress so as to exploit without hindrance" (Origin of Christianity and Judaism, 1994).

Indeed, this insight into the political dimensions of Christianity is of particular relevance to all Spiritual Seekers as it clearly demonstrates that in order for true Spirituality to successfully defend itself against Christian aggression, the battle must be fought and won not only in the cultural and religious field but also in the political arena.

Was Jesus enlightened?

An enlightened being is a Soul who has exceeded the boundaries of limited existence and shares in the Light of God's Infinite Knowledge and Wisdom.

Striving to "live in the Light of God" or to become a "child of the Light" is indeed a teaching that is found in the Bible. As the supreme example of Spiritual realisation, one would naturally expect Jesus to share in the Light, Knowledge and Wisdom of God to the fullest possible extent.

A number of biblical passages, however, suggest that this was not the case. For example, the Bible narrates that upon being baptised, that is, submerged in the river by John the Baptist, the gates of heaven were opened to Jesus and he saw the Spirit of God descending upon himself.

This is a curious statement. How did the writer know what Jesus saw? Moreover, if we think about it, an enlightened being, a "son of God" in particular, would already be submerged in the Spirit of God and would not see it descend upon himself as a result of any physical action!

Similarly, the last words of Jesus as he was dying on the cross were: "My God, why have you abandoned me?" It is difficult to see how an enlightened being who, moreover, is supposed to be one with God, can possibly feel abandoned at such an important point in his life.

By contrast, enlightened Yogis always report an experience of blissful unity with God when about to leave this World. This logically rules out the possibility of true enlightenment in Jesus. One difficulty that results from this is, if a man like Jesus was not enlightened, but on the contrary, felt abandoned by God, what chance does an ordinary Christian have?

Was Jesus the Christ?

The Bible says: "Be you perfect as your Father (God) Who is in heaven is perfect". The attainment of Perfection comes through Spiritual Practice.

Thus belief in the "saving power of Jesus" was not the only central teaching to early Christianity. A parallel teaching was that of **Spiritual Practice** as a means of eradicating imperfections.

The saving power of **Spiritual Practice** consists in its ability to remove all the defects and faults that prevent man from realising his Divine potential. Among these defects, the following seven are the most commonly described in Christian writings as "mortal sins": pride, greed, envy, anger, lust, gluttony and sloth.

Their elimination from one's heart and replacement with the seven virtues, humility, generosity, love, kindness, self-control, temperance and zeal, lead to Spiritual Purity and Perfection which enable man to free himself from the servitude to the material World into which he has fallen. Says the Bible: "Unless a man be born again (that is, born of and in Spirit) he cannot see the Kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

This reveals a hidden aspect of Christianity which is much closer to Yoga than the official faith-in-Jesus doctrine. Yogic texts abound in various lists of "defects" (dosha), "afflictions" (klesha), "distractions" (vikshepa) or "hindrances" (nivarana).

Thus in its presentation of Yogic teachings and practices, the Shiva Purana gives a list of ten impediments: (1) idleness, (2) illness, (3) carelessness, (4) doubt, (5) fickle-mindedness, (6) delusion or false beliefs, (7) lack of faith, (8) suffering (resulting from Spiritual, self-inflicted and divine causes), (9) dejection and (10) sensual overindulgence, which obstruct the human Soul's path to Spiritual Perfection and Salvation (Vayaviya Samhita II, 38:1-8).

Such impediments which are almost identical to those described in the Yoga Sutra (a pre-Christian text of the 2nd century BC) are to be removed through the practice of Yoga. "All the Yogin's obstacles and hindrances gradually perish if he perseveres in the excellent practice of Yoga", says the Shiva Purana. Indeed, Spiritual Practice in Yoga is known as "Saadhana" or Making Perfect - from "saadh", to accomplish, complete, correct, make perfect.

It is only by constantly straightening, correcting, perfecting or improving himself that man can hope to elevate himself to a higher level of consciousness and a higher plane of existence.

Yoga teaches that it is man's own responsibility to purify and cleanse himself of imperfections and defects. He cannot wait for God to do his Spiritual work in the same way as he doesn't wait for God to wash him, dress him or put food into his mouth.

"As the arrow-makers make the arrows straight, so the wise ones perfect themselves", runs one of the Buddha's sayings (Dhammapada 4:80).

This demonstrates that some important elements of early Christianity are a form of Yoga, which is not surprising considering that Indian Gurus are known to have been active in the Middle East both before and after the time of Jesus (as reported by ancient historians).

In consequence, there appear to be three layers to the biblical text. The first one is concerned with a person of the name Jesus (or Isa) who may or may not have been a historical figure. If we leave all the legends and myths aside, the evidence is simply insufficient to decide either way.

The second and older layer is that of a pre-Christian, classical mystery play many of which were fashionable in the religious and Spiritual circles of the time. Many of the biblical passages are simply too fanciful and theatrical to be accurate accounts of real facts.

The third layer consists of teachings that are very close or identical to those of Yoga. For example, God is said to be Light. The human Soul is the Light of God and therefore one with Him. This identity is realised through Spiritual Practice or Perfection.

What appears to have happened is that a political movement which may be identified with the Nazarenes (Nozrim) and other anti-Roman revolutionary groups, grafted the story of Jesus, their leader, upon an existing mystery play in order to promote their cause under the cover of a popular religious movement.

The mystery play itself (a kind of religious drama involving miracles which was also popular in Ancient India) must at some point have absorbed Yogic teachings which had reached the Graeco-Roman World through Hindu and Buddhist missionaries.

For example, the Christian myth of Jesus as a divine child has exact parallels in the long-established tradition of Hindu deities (Ganapati, Skandha, Rama, Krishna, etc.) the life stories of whom are related by

means of dramatic performances involving ritual costumes, masks, dancing and symbolic gestures whereby Spiritual teachings are conveyed to the faithful in a vivid and striking manner.

The Western concept of a divine child as the founder of a new faith is therefore neither unique nor exclusively Western. Indeed, it may be of Eastern origin. It is a typical expression of the cultural arrogance of Western man to imagine that everything originated in the West.

In addition to this, there were hundreds of "Christian" Gospels in circulation apart from the official four. The majority of these were typically more concerned with Spiritual Knowledge and Practice than the life story of Jesus as such.

Of particular significance are the writings of the Johannites or Mandaeans, an ancient Middle-Eastern faith which reveres John the Baptist as the true prophet and which appears to have had links with the religions of Ancient Sumer and India.

In former times, the Johannite tradition enjoyed great popularity throughout the Middle East and its leader is widely known as King Yahia, Yahia-Yuhana, Yahia Ibn Zakariyya or Yohannan. The Bible itself says that he was "a burning and a shining light" and that "among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist". This is an interesting statement which raises John the Baptist above Abraham, Moses and all other prophets of the biblical tradition, including perhaps Jesus himself.

At any rate, Prophet John's tradition of initiating his disciples through baptism, is clearly linked to the great traditions of Oannes, the Ancient Sumerian Water God, and the Indian God Shiva who is known as Bearer of the Water of Life (Gangadhara), Lord of Waters (Jaleshvara), The Water-Formed One (Jala-Murti), etc.

In the Judaeo-Christian Bible, water plays a prominent role in the Creation of the World, while in the Hindu Rig Veda, waters are said to know the origin of Heaven and Earth, and the Supreme Being is referred to as "the Glory of the Floods".

This common link demonstrates a shared belief in water as a symbol of life and reveals a hidden connection between the religions of the Middle East (including Judaism and Christianity) and the timeless Spirituality of India where ritual bathing (majjana or snaana) symbolic of the Soul's immersion in the Universal Self, has been practised since prehistoric times.

Curiously, although the Church recognises the biblical teaching of "wise men from the East" and the tradition of "the light of the East", it has persistently ignored and denied any links with the great religions of the East such as Hinduism, or even with the tradition of the Mandaeans whose Prophet, after all, baptised the founder of the Christian Church, Jesus Christ himself.

Besides baptism, numerous other Christian practices have been borrowed from the East, such as: the use of incense, candles, bells, religious symbols and images, prayer-beads, praying with hands joined together, etc., etc.

The Western World will continue to undermine its own Spiritual progress unless it has the courage and integrity to shed its prejudices and acknowledge the true origin of its religious beliefs and practices.

Be that as it may, the fact that the Church chose those Gospels which deal primarily with the story of and belief in Jesus, as its exclusive scriptural authority, suggests some ulterior motive. This is supported by the Church leaders' involvement in politics from the days of St Paul down to this day.

The True Christ

As to whether Jesus was the Christ or not, if he was a descendant of King David as the Bible claims, then he was naturally entitled to be called "Christ" or "Anointed One" as this was the title given to kings in Israel, Greece, Egypt and other parts of the Ancient World. This, however, does not make him "the Christ" in the sense of World Saviour. That Jesus didn't save the World is obvious to all thinking men. He didn't even manage to save his people from the Romans, let alone the World!

Indeed, Jesus couldn't have been the Saviour as the only true Saviour is God Himself. This is why Jesus asks his followers to pray to God (the Father in Heaven) not to himself.

Even on the purely hypothetical supposition that Jesus had had the power to save anyone, this couldn't have happened without the Will and Power of God. Jesus himself admits that "I can of my own self do nothing: because I seek not my own will but that of the Father" and "My Father (God) is greater than I".

Another important point that becomes evident upon the careful examination of the Gospel text is that Jesus did not regard his own teachings as perfect or complete. Thus according to John 16:12-13, he says: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now. However when the Spirit of Truth has come, he will guide you into *all* Truth".

In the same Gospel (14:26) Jesus again says: "The Comforter, whom the Father (God) will send unto you shall teach you all things". This evidently implies a higher teaching authority who will complete and perfect Jesus's own. This Higher Authority is God Himself Who is the Highest Teacher.

God, therefore, is the true Saviour. However, He saves Mankind not by sacrificing Himself for the sins of men (as Jesus is supposed to have done), but by revealing His Eternal Law (Sanatana Dharma) to those who are willing and able to receive and follow it.

The name "Jesus" itself which is Iesous in Greek but Isa in Middle Eastern Languages may actually be derived from Isa or Isha (also Ishaana, Ishvara, etc.), one of Lord Shiva's holy names - from "ish", to own, possess, rule - hence Ishvara, the Lord, Master and Ruler of the Universe. "Ishva" in the Sanskrit language also means Master in the sense of Spiritual Teacher.

This is the true meaning of the word "Saviour" ("Christ" in Greek or "Taraka" in Sanskrit) and that Saviour is Lord Shiva Himself, the Supreme Being and World Teacher who imparts the Teachings of Yoga (Yoga Dharma) whereby man attains Unity with God and his fellow men and the Kingdom of God (Shiva-Laya) is established on Earth in obedience to Divine Command.

While the Eastern tradition correctly identifies God, the Supreme Being, as the Comforter (Santoshada), Supreme Teacher (Parama Guru) and Saviour (Taraka), all these being titles held by Lord Shiva, the West continues to cling on to the supremacy of Jesus while seeking at the same time to suppress all other faiths.

This therefore is the true position of Yoga: Mankind must choose between a politically motivated "faith" which has given us colonialism, imperialism, religious wars and genocide, and a true Spirituality which has given the World Yoga, meditation, enlightenment and wisdom.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 29

YOGA AND HINDUTVA

QUESTION: What is Hindutva and how does Yoga relate to it?

ANSWER: Hindutva is just another name for Hinduism. However, while the term Hinduism is often restricted to the religious beliefs and practices of India, Hindutva includes all aspects of Indian culture and civilisation.

More specifically, Hindutva represents the **resistance movement** against the cultural, religious and economic domination of India by Western powers.

To understand why such a resistance movement is necessary, it is important to understand what Hinduism is. Hinduism is the culture, religion and civilisation not only of India and Asia but of the whole World.

In the same way as fraudulent political parties come to power by telling lies about their opponents, modern religions have come to power by telling lies about earlier faiths. Thus most people outside India have been conditioned by the official propaganda of the ruling classes to think that Hinduism is some kind of strange and alien faith.

However, if we carefully examine the historical and archaeological evidence, we will see that all ancient religions, for example, the Pagan tradition of Europe, the religion of Ancient Egypt, Israel, Arabia, Africa, America and Australia were different forms of Hinduism.

Even modern Western religions such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam, are mere modifications of the Original World Faith which in the Indian tradition is known as **Sanatana Dharma**, the Supreme Eternal Law of the Universe.

In the same way as children are different from their parents yet at the same time are born of and share many characteristics with them, so also all religious traditions on Earth are born of and share many characteristics with the **Original World Faith**.

However, while some children show recognition and respect towards their parents, others distance themselves from them and in extreme cases even turn against them. Similarly, while the great religions of Asia such as Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism acknowledge their descent from the Original Faith (Dharma), Western religions have chosen not only to deny any links with their Parent Faith but have actively sought to destroy it.

The Original World Faith was systematically wiped out by the Establishment religions in Europe and large parts of Africa, Asia, America and the rest of the World. India is the only country on Earth where the Original Faith is still recognised and followed by millions of people.

While much of the World has fallen into the clutches of the expansionist and predatory Western Imperialist forces which seek to impose their political, religious and cultural supremacy on the human race, India has remained a glimmer of hope, an island of refuge and a beacon of light in the darkness of Westernism which has engulfed the World.

The Globalist Conspiracy

India is one of the World's most ancient, advanced and successful civilisations. Millennia ago, when Europe was largely dominated by nomadic tribes, India was already a flowering civilisation of great

sophistication. Natural resources like gold, diamonds, pearls, ivory, timber, spices and cotton enabled Indian traders to exchange goods with far-away places from Egypt and Rome to China and Japan. Combined with the industriousness of her artisans and farmers and the wisdom of her military and religious leaders, this enabled India to achieve World fame as one of the wealthiest and most prosperous nations on Earth.

Unfortunately, India's unparalleled success gave rise to resentment, jealousy, envy and hatred in the leaders of foreign powers. This resulted in a long string of invasions, occupation and subjugation of her people by alien forces. The intention of these invading forces, from Persians and Greeks to Mongols, Arabs and Europeans, has always been to colonize and enslave the people of India.

However, while in the past such anti-Indian actions remained isolated, the rise of Globalism has generated a concerted effort by the World powers to bring India under their ruthless control. Mutually incompatible ideologies such as Capitalism, Communism, Christianity and Islam, have discovered a common enemy in the Spirituality of India.

Thus the leaders of Europe, America, the Arab World and China have conspired to form a Globalist Coalition the main goal of which is to dominate the World. Spiritual knowledge, reason, wisdom and common sense have been identified as the main obstacle that has to be eliminated in order for the Globalist Entity to accomplish its evil designs of World domination.

In this process, India which is the Bastion of Spiritual Knowledge and Wisdom on Earth has been targeted as the main enemy to be isolated and destroyed.

The Globalist Methods

The three main factors in the Globalist method of Conquest have been military occupation, economic domination and cultural colonization.

Direct military occupation is currently seen as controversial. It would be difficult for the Globalist Coalition which is operating under the pretence of "Freedom", "Democracy", "Racial Equality" and "Peace" to directly attack India. Nor is such direct action necessary. About half of the original territory of India, including Pakistan, Bangladesh, Kashmir, Nepal and Tibet is already under the occupation of foreign powers which are given military support by Europe, America, the Arab World and China.

This encroachment of foreign powers on Indian territory is happening in more subtle ways such as the domination of large areas of North-East India by a coalition of Chinese-inspired Communist militants and Western-supported (US- and UK-backed) Christian fundamentalists.

Any potential resistance against such stealth invasion and occupation is prevented through economic and cultural domination. If the Indian people are even partly converted to the beliefs of Globalist Westernism, they will have no inclination to resist Westernist designs on India and even if they did wish to resist they would be in no position to do so as they will be economically completely dependent on the Globalist Coalition.

The Internal Enemy

The Globalist Entity would, of course, be incapable of realising its diabolic designs without the help of Westernist elements within India herself. We shall therefore identify the internal enemy and his methods of operation within India without which the Globalist Conspiracy would have no hold on the great Indian Nation.

The leaders of the Muslim, Christian and other Western-implemented minorities of India have always sought to destroy Indian religion and culture without much success. Their dream only began to come true thanks to the anti-Indian actions of the British Colonial forces which held India under their brutal occupation until the 1940s.

India had always been a tolerant society where inter-religious tension and conflict was virtually unknown previous to the Western colonization of India. Different faiths such as Yoga, Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism coexisted peacefully for many centuries.

All this changed, however, with the importation of Islam into India by Arab traders and armed invaders. When the British Colonialists took over from the Arabs, they proceeded to divide Indian society by religious denomination and play one religious group against the others in a classical example of divide-and-rule tactics.

Any Indian attempt to form an opposition to this Western domination was brutally repressed by the British occupiers. We only need to mention the anti-Indian massacres committed by the British during the 1857 Uprising. Other forms of anti-Indian repression were more subtle but equally devastating.

The pro-independence movement headed by Mahatma Gandhi and other pacifists was given undeserved precedence over more militant patriotic organisations in order to divide and confuse the Indian people. As a result, upon the British withdrawal from India in 1947, the left-wing Indian National Congress (Congress Party) which had long been collaborating with the anti-Hindu Muslim League, came to be the new dominant force in India.

To get an idea of the Congress Party's true intentions it will suffice to mention its support for the radical Islamic "Khilafat movement" which from 1919 was agitating for the recreation of the Turkish Ottoman Empire, one of India's most deadly enemies.

This leftist-Muslim Alliance engineered the division of India into Muslim-dominated Pakistan and secularist-dominated India; abolished the Monarchy and made India into a Communist-orientated republic; and finally opened the country to unrestricted influence and domination by the neo-colonialist forces of International Materialism and Globalism.

The dominating Congress Party is able to win influence and power with promises of progress, equality and prosperity. Such promises, however, really serve the purpose of concealing the politicians' true intention which is to use minority votes to reinforce their own otherwise weak position vis-a-vis the electorate.

Thus if the Congress Party cannot muster sufficient votes on its own, all it needs to do is to ally itself with the Muslims, Communists and other anti-Hindu minorities in order to keep the Hindu majority down and out of power.

Were the Congress party truly interested in the Unity of India, it would logically ally itself with the pro-Hindu parties and obtain an absolute majority as a legitimate representative of the Indian Nation the majority of which is Hindu.

This, however, would give too much power to the Hindu majority which is unthinkable for Congress purposes. As a result, India continues to be ruled by a coalition of minorities whose sole common interest is to keep the Hindu majority down and accelerate the decline of Indian culture and civilisation so that it can be finally replaced by Westernism.

Thus the final solution aimed at by the West and its Western-indoctrinated, left-wing Indian helpers, is the complete extermination of Indian culture and religion. As part of this strategy, Hindu temples have been placed under the direct control of the secular (atheist and anti-Hindu) Congress Government in a chilling

reminder of Stalinist Russia where Christian churches were under the direct control of the atheist Communist Government, and Nazi Germany where Jewish temples were at the mercy of the anti-Jewish Government!

The temple revenue derived from temple-owned lands, donations by the faithful, etc., which was traditionally employed for maintenance and repair work, religious education, helping the poor and other welfare activities, is now going straight into the pockets of the Congress Government and its anti-Hindu leaders.

As a result, Hindu temples are rapidly decaying, the priests can no longer support themselves and their families, religious education is practically non-existent and the poor are turning to Congress and foreign "charities" for help which is given them on condition that they renounce their Hindu faith.

The Ayodhya Scandal

No analysis of the religious situation in India would be complete without an account of the infamous Ayodhya case.

The Ayodhya dispute which has become a cause celebre revolves around a Hindu temple in Ayodhya (Uttar Pradesh, North India) built in commemoration of the birth of Lord Rama, a popular Hindu deity.

The temple was destroyed in 1528 during the anti-Hindu campaign carried out by Babur, a descendant of Genghis Khan and founder of the Mongol Empire in India, and its location has been illegally occupied by Muslim forces ever since.

Although officially authorised investigations by the Archaeological Survey of India found the evidence at the disputed site to be consistent with the "distinctive features of North Indian temples", the Congress-controlled, Globalist-inspired High Court has denied the Hindu community their right to rebuild their temple.

Apart from this blatant conspiracy against Indian religion and culture there are deeper aspects to the general problem. These become evident if we consider that although the reconstruction of the Rama Temple would constitute a clear victory for religious freedom, it can do little to stop the ongoing disintegration of Hindu religion as a whole.

Indeed, from the holistic and unitary perspective of Yoga, such developments merely encourage the spread of a plethora of local cults such as Ramaism and Krishnaism at the expense of the Universal Shiva Faith (Shiva Dharma) which honours Lord Shiva as the Supreme Deity and True Master of the Universe.

Thus even legitimate initiatives aiming to advance Indian religion and culture may inadvertently play into the hands of anti-Indian Congress Party and their Western masters with whom they have conspired to destroy the cultural and Spiritual heritage of India.

This Globalist Conspiracy becomes clear from the way in which the international media have chosen to ignore the Archaeological Survey of India's findings on Ayodhya and unanimously declared that no evidence was found!

Nor must we think of Ayodhya as an isolated case. This disturbing situation is being systematically replicated in the unchallenged destruction of thousands of ancient Hindu temples by organised criminal gangs who make a fortune from selling stolen statues of deities and other priceless religious artefacts to Western tourists and "art-collectors". We may observe that you will never hear of Hindus commissioning criminals to rob Western churches and cathedrals!

This demonstrates that, firstly, despite its technological advances, Western "Civilisation" is far more primitive and destructive than its Indian counterpart. Secondly, as no attempts whatever are made by the authorities to stop or prevent this scandalous traffic in stolen religious art, it demonstrates that such criminal activities represent an inherent part in the Western plan to destroy Indian religion and culture by any means.

This is further confirmed by the fact that monuments glorifying British and Islamic Colonialism in India are accorded the respect and reverence normally reserved for the most sacred religious shrines. We only need to take a look at the "Taj Mahal", that monstrous monument to Islamic arrogance built at the expense of starving Indian children, reminiscent of a giant octopus ready to spread its poisonous tentacles all over the sacred soil of India, which is being advertised by the Globalist forces worldwide as a "Wonder of the World" while Indian temples are denigrated as "places of idolatrous practices".

From a Yogic point of view, true architectural beauty may be found in such jewels of human endeavour as the magnificent temples at Khajuraho (Central India), the Potala Palace at Lhasa (Tibet) or the Angkor Wat Temple in Cambodia. Their exquisite designs, graceful proportions and elegant harmony with the surrounding landscape qualify them as unsurpassed architectural achievements.

By contrast, unnatural and degenerate excrescences produced by the deranged mind of the likes of Shah Jahan (the builder of the Taj Mahal) are offensive to both Spiritual aesthetic and genuine religious feeling. In short, they are an insult to human civilisation and God. Their negative energy spreads for many miles around, polluting the World with its morbid emanations. In consequence, they should not be suffered on the face of the Earth for even a moment.

It may be objected at this point that irrespective of religious and cultural issues, Globalism is supposed to be good for people. Indeed, this is the official propaganda line. The reality, however, is quite the opposite.

For example, it is claimed in Globalist circles that the outsourcing of jobs to India by Western telecommunication companies, law firms, etc., represents much-needed progress for the Indian Nation.

On reflection, however, it is difficult to see how turning India into a nation of Western-employed telephonists and secretaries can possibly improve her position vis-a-vis the West. The shocking truth is that India continues to be an obedient servant to the West in many respects.

Indian farmers are being coaxed by Globalist activists into selling their cattle - traditionally employed for agricultural work - and buying Western-made tractors (or other agricultural machinery) instead. Before long, however, they discover that they have no means of buying expensive replacement parts, petrol, etc.

In no time at all, the tractors are rusting away in the fields and the farmers must either take further futile loans from the Government, the World Bank or similar agents of Globalism (disguised as "development agencies", "charities", etc.) or resign themselves to a miserable existence in one of the many growing slums outside big cities.

Similarly, while slavery has long been abolished in many parts of the World, millions of Indians are still slaving away on tea plantations in order to supply the West with its bourgeois beverage, instead of growing food for their own families.

Were the Western World serious about helping India or at least treating her as an equal trade partner, it would open its own markets to more Indian-made goods instead of barricading itself against everything from textiles to agricultural produce.

Thus sixty long years on, the Indian people remain enslaved by the very same colonialist powers from which they were supposed to have liberated themselves! At the same time their great culture and civilisation is being systematically eroded, dismantled and annihilated by the same Globalist forces.

Even if we were to leave aside all cultural, religious and economic implications of Globalism, we cannot ignore its disastrous effects on the environment, natural resources, water supplies, as well as plant, animal and human life throughout Asia and other parts of the World which must endure rising levels of suffering and deprivation to satisfy the ever-growing demands of the Western-dominated Globalist Entity.

What becomes evident is that, like many other nations on Earth, the Indian people have become a helpless victim struggling to break free from the Globalist spiderweb of intrigue, deception, corruption, and lies.

It is a great tragedy that otherwise decent people in the West allow themselves to be overcome by indifference and selfishness and fail to empathize with the fate of the Indian people who under cover of "Freedom", "Democracy", "Progress", "Globalism", etc., are systematically colonised, enslaved and robbed of their cultural identity by the forces of Westernism.

The rise of Hindutva

It is against the background of such depressing and deeply disturbing developments that the national resistance movement of India came into being.

It was heart-breaking enough for the gentle Indian people to see their beloved Motherland being invaded, trampled underfoot, taken over, robbed, divided, fragmented and mutilated by the evil colonialists. Having, on top of that, their mind and Soul systematically colonised, enslaved, contaminated, polluted and poisoned by a Western-imposed neo-colonialist culture of corruption, manipulation, delusion and deceit proved too much even for the goodhearted Indian people to bear.

Therefore, already in 1915, when India was under British occupation, the Great Hindu Council (Hindu Mahasabha) was founded as an instrument of opposition to Western domination. A number of other pro-Hindu organisations soon appeared on the political scene: the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Bharatiya Janata Party, Shiv Sena and others. Their common goal was to put an end to the deliberate attempt by Westernist forces to discredit, demonise, undermine and destroy Indian religion and culture.

Thanks to the Hindutva movement, after centuries of subjugation and oppression, Indians were able for the first time to claim their right to express and advance their own view of state and society which - as citizens of India - had always been theirs by birth but had been denied by the colonial powers.

Apart from campaigning for the right of the Indian people to their own cultural and Spiritual identity, and working for true democracy, freedom and equality, the Hindutva movement is also a campaign of clarification, illumination and information aiming to expose the parasitic and malign nature of the Westernist powers and their allies.

Through the Hindutva movement the Indian people are asserting their moral and legal right to promote the time-honoured Spiritual Principles of India as a legitimate alternative to the materialist agenda of Western-imposed "democracy".

As the eminent historian Dr. Arnold J Toynbee observed, **"the only way of Salvation is the ancient Hindu way"**.

India needs Hinduism and its Hindutva movement to complete the necessary transition from a shameful and humiliating past of colonial subjugation to a proud future of freedom and self-determination.

As for the World, it needs the Spirituality of India as a counterweight to the World-dominating Western forces of Capitalism, Communism, Christianity and Islam. Indeed, without the timeless Spirituality of India Mankind will remain incomplete, less balanced and less human.

Yoga is intimately linked to Hinduism in many ways, not least because it has been subjected to the same process of colonization, subjugation and commercialisation by the materialist and anti-Spiritual forces of the Globalist Entity, as Hinduism has.

While Hinduism represents the outer and more visible layer of Indian Spirituality, Yoga is the innermost core of the same timeless tradition. Together they constitute the purest form of Sanatana Dharma, the Supreme Eternal Law of the Universe which the human race must embrace not only to fulfil its higher destiny but to survive into the next century and beyond. See also **THE HALL OF SHAME**.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: F.A.Q. 30

OBSTACLES ON THE YOGA PATH

QUESTION: What are the main obstacles in Yoga and what is the best way to overcome them?

ANSWER: Genuine Spiritual progress consists in a widening of Spiritual horizon or enlargement of the human capacity for Spiritual experience. In other words, Spiritual progress is an **expansion of Consciousness**.

Anything that hinders or impairs this expansion of Consciousness is an **obstacle (antaraya)** to be overcome. In order to efficiently overcome obstacles it is helpful to understand what they are and how they arise.

To begin with, it is necessary to understand that all our experiences are a creation of Consciousness. While some experiences are generated directly by the Universal Consciousness (the Supreme Intelligence) others are generated through the medium of the individual consciousness (the human mind). Whether Universal or individual, Divine or human, higher or lower, all experience is created by Consciousness and so are obstacles.

In the same way as the Sky can appear as clear, partly covered by clouds or completely dark, Consciousness can appear as bright, "coloured" or obscure.

In terms of ordinary experience, human consciousness is perceived as "clear and bright" in the waking state, as "active" in the dream state and as "obscure" in deep sleep.

In emotional terms, these distinct modalities of Consciousness are experienced as (1) happy, (2) passionate or affected and (3) dull. They are the three basic **qualities (gunas)** of Consciousness which together form the raw material of all human experience.

The Holy Scriptures of India are unique in their detailed description of psychological states and processes. Thus, in his commentary on the Gospel of Divine Recognition by the great Yogi and Apostle of the True Faith Utpaladeva, Mahamaheshvara Abhinava Gupta gives an enlightening example of how the three modalities of Consciousness are experienced in everyday life.

For example, consciousness of one's child as a loved being is experienced as the modality of **happiness (sattva)**; Consciousness of the child as being ill is experienced as the modality of **pain (rajas)**; complete absence of Consciousness is the modality of **dullness (tamas)** (Ishvara Pratyabhijna Vimarshini IV, 1:6).

Happiness is produced by the presence of Consciousness. Dullness is produced by the absence of Consciousness. Pain is produced when Consciousness is both present and absent simultaneously. Thus in the above example, pain is experienced when Consciousness of one's child is accompanied by absence of Consciousness of his being free from illness.

When Consciousness or knowledge to the effect that the child ought to be well is accompanied by Consciousness of the fact that wellness is missing in him, our awareness oscillates between the one and the other and this movement or activity produces an inner conflict which is experienced as painful. By contrast, happiness is experienced when there is an awareness that all is well.

In consequence, Consciousness and the absence thereof are like **light** and **darkness** which in the outer World combine to give shape and form to the objects of perception. Together they give rise to all our experiences in the same way as two different colours such as black and white harmoniously blend together in the plumage of a bird (magpie, cuckoo, etc.)

We may note in passing that Western science regards white as the sum total of different wavelengths of visible light, and black as the absence of the same. Scientifically speaking, therefore, white and black are denied the status of proper colours. In psychological terms, however, the fact is that both white and black are perceived by the human faculty of sight. And seeing is, by definition, the perception of colour, there being nothing else that the faculty of sight could perceive. In consequence, Yoga treats black and white as colours.

Moreover, Western science agrees that all colours are a product of light. The only difference is that while Western science maintains that light is a physical force, Yogic science teaches that all light is ultimately nothing but the Light of Consciousness, that is, the power whereby Consciousness "shines" or projects everything into existence.

Therefore, just as a bird is perceived by means of the colours black and white and their combination, so every experience arises in us as a result of presence and absence of Consciousness and their combination.

The **primary emotions** which are produced by the basic modalities of Consciousness, **sattva, rajas, tamas** and their interaction are the following eight: attraction, wonder, courage, mirth, aversion, anger, fear and sorrow.

The first four of these may be termed "positive" and the last four "negative". If we couple one of the first four with one of the last, we obtain a pair of mutually opposed states: attraction-aversion, courage-fear, mirth-sorrow, etc.

This clearly observable pattern of **opposites (dvandva)** follows the original model of Consciousness and Unconsciousness, or Light and Darkness, acting like a prism, as it were, which breaks down the fundamental Unity of Reality into a wide range of experience in the same way as a crystal breaks down a ray of light into many-coloured smaller rays.

The **eight primary emotions (sthaayi-bhavas)** which are permanently embedded in our consciousness at a deeper level and which may, therefore, be compared with undercurrents in the sea, give rise to more **superficial and transient emotions (sanchaari-bhavas)** which temporarily appear in the mind in certain circumstances and are therefore comparable to waves and ripples rising and subsiding on the surface of the sea. All of these are capable of coupling with each other in many different combinations producing a practically unlimited range of emotional states.

In the same way as some of the **primary emotions** are negative in the sense that they obscure man's awareness of a Higher Reality, so many of the **transient emotions**, too, can bring our consciousness down.

Negative, unspiritual or consciousness-contracting emotions are, of course, not the only obstacles to higher states of consciousness. Unspiritual thoughts can equally hinder the Soul's Spiritual progress. So does physical incapacity or illness. If we consider how easy it is for man to lose his way in a jungle of emotions, thoughts and physical concerns, it cannot come as a surprise to see that much of the human race is in a state of ignorance, disorientation and confusion.

However, mankind is not completely lost. Just as the Sun always shines behind the clouds, so a better life beckons from behind all obstacles. It is not mere coincidence that the Physical World is illumined by the Sun. This World is a reflection of a Higher World and therefore it reflects a Higher Truth.

From the perspective of this Higher Truth, the only basic emotion is **Pure Bliss (Aananda)** which is the natural state of Consciousness. This emotion is called **Shiva Bhava**, the Supreme Peace and Happiness of God. It is against the background of this Original State that all other emotions arise and subside.

Thus at the transcendental level of **Higher Truth (Paramaarthha Satya)** there is only one emotion which characterises the Universal Consciousness. At the level of **ordinary experience (sammata satya)**, however, there are countless emotional states, some uplifting, others depressing, which cause embodied consciousness to go up and down like driftwood carried by waves.

What becomes evident from this is that all sentient beings have the capacity to get either closer to or further away from the Original State of Divine Consciousness (Shiva Bhava), depending on which emotional current or wave they are riding.

For although emotions may automatically arise from the deep of our subconscious, we have the power to consciously decide which emotions we allow to determine our mental states and actions, and which it would be wise to avoid or suppress. This capacity of emotional self-control can be developed and cultivated by anyone depending on the stage of Spiritual evolution occupied by each person.

Why do obstacles arise?

It is clear from what has been said before that obstacles are thoughts, emotions and physical actions which induce our consciousness to contract and cut us off from the Supreme Reality, the Universal Consciousness of which we are an inseparable part.

The question that may be asked at this point is, why do such obstructive mental states arise? There are two primary causes which we may identify as being responsible for the rise of obstacles: **Karma** and **Divine Will**.

Karma is defined as activities, mental, emotional or physical carried out by a person, as well as their results or **effects (Karmaphala)** taken either collectively or individually.

The Spiritual Law of the Universe or Divine Justice (Dharma) demands that every action whether it be a thought, feeling, word or physical act, cause a corresponding reaction the effect of which is suffered (or enjoyed) by the agent.

This may happen indirectly. For example, if a man causes mental, emotional or physical pain to a sentient being, he is liable to suffer similar pain, or its equivalent, at some point in future which may be either in this life or some future existence.

Or it may happen in a more direct manner. For example, a certain thought or emotion may be indulged in repeatedly until it leaves a deep **imprint (samskaara)** in our consciousness which may be reactivated automatically when circumstances are conducive to this. To this class of Karma belong all habitual patterns of behaviour (cognitive, volitional, etc.).

The other important cause which is responsible for the rise of obstacles, is the **Will of God**. God has His Own Plan for His Creation and may, therefore, put obstacles on somebody's path for reasons known to Him alone.

How many obstacles are there?

One list, which occurs in both Eastern and Western texts (with some variations), gives seven fundamental obstacles: desire, attachment, fear, anger, lust, greed and sloth. These are also known as "Sins", that is, things which separate the human Soul from his own true nature as well as from the Creator.

On its part, the Ancient Gospel of Shiva (Shiva Mahaapuraana) enumerates the following ten obstacles to progress in Yoga: (1) idleness, (2) illness, (3) carelessness, (4) doubt, (5) fickle-mindedness, (6) delusion or false beliefs, (7) lack of faith, (8) pain (resulting from Spiritual, self-inflicted or divine causes), (9) dejection and (10) sensual overindulgence.

These two lists clearly refer to different levels of Spiritual development. Thus negative and destructive emotions like fear, anger and greed, belong to early stages when the human mind is still under the domination of primitive psychological states, whereas episodes of carelessness, fickle-mindedness and doubt are more likely to occur in the more advanced stages. Also, while some lists are limited to psychological obstacles, others include physical ones such as illness. Such lists, therefore, are not mutually exclusive but complementary.

It goes almost without saying that every person has certain factors in his inner or outer life that constitute an obstacle or a cluster of obstacles to him personally. For example, while one man may be prone to envy another may get easily angry and still another may overindulge in sensual enjoyment, and so on.

Moreover, what is an obstacle to one person can be a "blessing in disguise" to another. It is therefore impossible to draw a list of obstacles that would be universally applicable to all human beings.

For this reason, Scriptures can deal with a limited number of obstacles only, as a sample of imperfections a Spiritual seeker needs to work on in order to perfect himself and become fit for higher experience. What these obstacles are in each case, must be established by the Seeker himself through self-examination, reflection and meditation as well as on the advice of the **Guru (Spiritual mentor)** who is a true Doctor of the Soul.

Are psychic powers an obstacle?

As the Sun consists of light and heat, Consciousness consists of **Awareness** and **Creative Power** (or Knowledge and Action). Just as the Sun cannot be separated from his power of heat or fire from its power to burn, Consciousness cannot be separated from its power to create or act.

As Spiritual Practice brings about an expansion of Consciousness, the power of action increases in direct proportion to the power of awareness. **Psychic Power (Siddhi)**, that is, the capacity to accomplish things which are impossible to accomplish by ordinary means, is a natural effect of Yoga Practice. After all, one of the main characteristics of Spiritual men is that they can know and accomplish things which ordinary people can not.

Psychic Powers are an expression of a Soul's growing power. They cannot in and of themselves represent an obstacle. They are capable of obstructing our progress only when and to the extent that our power of action is not matched by our power of knowledge. A person of great physical strength endowed with a weak and unstable mind is capable of becoming a danger both to himself and others. The same applies to Psychic Powers.

Moreover, like all other powers such as walking, speaking or thinking, Psychic Powers take time to develop, perfect and control. Uncontrollable clairvoyance, for example, can flood our field of awareness with unwanted visions which can distract us from Spiritual Practice or impair our day-to-day life.

Such Powers can also become an obstacle when acquired and used for purposes that are improper or contrary to the Spiritual Laws of the Universe. Apart from this, however, they are a clear sign of progress on the Yoga Path and can strengthen the Yogi's confidence and faith in his final success.

As explained in the Shiva Mahaapuraana, the danger of becoming attached to Psychic Powers and their miraculous effects is removed through detachment and the desire to work for the good of the entire World. The Yogi is then able to enjoy all kinds of supernatural experience as well as attain Salvation.

Tri-Mala: the Threefold Obstacle

To sum up, we may say that all obstacles are reducible to just three, interdependent **Obstructive Principles** or **Defects (Malas)** which are also known as **Bondages (Paasha)**: Wrong Action (Dur-Aachaara), Wrong Knowledge (Dur-Jnaana) and Wrong Awareness (Dur-Darshana).

Wrong Action is any activity that prevents us from advancing on the Path, for example, the misuse of power (psychic or ordinary). Such actions can only happen as a result of **Wrong Knowledge** and Wrong Knowledge can only arise as a result of **Wrong Awareness**.

Put in other words, Wrong Awareness results in Wrong Knowledge and Wrong Knowledge results in Wrong Action.

For example, if a man is not aware of himself as a free, intelligent and happy Soul but believes himself to be a physical body, his knowledge about the World becomes limited to material things and he acts with a view to acquire material possessions. In extreme cases, his judgement may become so obscured that he will even commit crimes in order to advance his materialist interests at the expense of fellow humans and other living beings.

Other forms of Wrong Belief are Communism, Capitalism, Atheism, and all kinds of Extremist Beliefs, False or Man-made Religions, etc.

By contrast, if a man is aware of his true self or at least believes himself to be a Soul, that is, a living orb of Consciousness and Bliss, and he steadfastly holds on to that belief, then his mental faculties will operate on the basis of that, he will take a keen interest in Spiritual Knowledge, and he will accordingly act for the spiritual upliftment of Mankind as intended by our Lord and Creator.

In consequence, Right Awareness or Right Belief (Sat-Darshana), Right Knowledge (Sat-Jnaana) and Right Conduct (Sat-Aachaara) together form the antidote to all evil in the World. For this reason they are known as the Three Remedies or Three Jewels (Tri-Ratna).

Self-awareness: the Highest Yoga

Among all forms of Right Awareness, Self-awareness is the highest. Awareness of our Divine Nature is the most powerful remedy for the removal of all obstacles. It is awakened through **Meditation on the Supreme**. Therefore, Meditation is the highest form of Spiritual Practice.

Says the Shiva Puraana: "Both Psychic Powers and Salvation are the direct fruit of **Meditation on Shiva**. As a blazing fire burns both dry and wet twigs, so also the Fire of Meditation burns both good and bad Karma. As a little light dispels darkness, so also even a little Yoga Practice (i.e., Meditation) destroys great sins. Therefore, let one practise Meditation dilligently."

Meditation may be performed on a human-like image of God as He is traditionally represented in the sacred art of India. This is due to the fact that the Lord appeared to His devotees in human-like form in order to impart the Mysteries of Yoga to the World.

In such images, the Visible Manifestation of the Supreme is depicted as a youthful Yogi wearing the Crescent Moon on His forehead (as a symbol of Enlightenment) and bearing various insignia of Divine Power in His hands, such as the Trident (Trishula) and Hour-glass Drum (Damaru).

In more advanced stages of meditation, the Yogi contemplates the Nature of the Lord as an Infinite Ocean of Light (symbolic of the World-pervading Light of Consciousness).

Meditation may also be practised with the help of a **Mantra** (a mystic chant containing the Sacred Name of the Supreme) on which the devotee may concentrate his mind even in the midst of daily life. The purpose of Meditation is to establish contact with the Divine and finally attain **Total Unity and Identity with Him (Shiva-Samaadhi)**.

However, the regular practice of Meditation (Dhyaana) requires a strong will and determination on the part of the devotee, for which reason it is also known as **Ichhaa-Yoga (the Yoga of Will-Power)**. Therefore, those who do not possess a high degree of will-power may successfully employ the **Eightfold Practice of Yoga (Yoga Ashtaanga)**.

The Eight Limbs of Jnaana Yoga

This form of Yoga consists of three Preliminary Practices - Prathamika Nityakarmma (1-3) - and five Advanced Practices - Kartagama Nityakarmma (4-8) - which are:

- 1. Self-control (Yama)**
- 2. Spiritual Observance (Niyama)**
- 3. Posture (Asana)**
- 4. Breath-control (Praanaayaama)**
- 5. Detachment (Pratyaahaara)**
- 6. Concentration (Dhaaranaa)**
- 7. Meditation (Dhyaana)**
- 8. Inward Absorption (Samaadhi).**

1. Self-control (Yama) is of five kinds: Truthfulness, that is, Adherence to and Action in accordance with Truth (Satya, the highest of which is Shiva, the Supreme Being, Himself), Non-violence (Ahimsaa), Not Stealing (Asteya), Right Sexual Conduct (Dharmacharya), and Disinterest in Material Possessions (Aparigraha).

2. Spiritual Observance or Duty (Niyama) is likewise of five kinds: Austerity (Tapas), Spiritual Study (Svaadhyaya), Purity (Shaucha), Contentment (Santosha), and Worship of God (Ishvara-Pujaana).

3. Posture (Aasana) is defined as being primarily that which is conducive to health, peace and clarity of mind. The most important of all postures are those in which the body is held upright as in the classical meditation position known as the "lotus-posture" (padmaasana).

4. Breath-control (Praanaayaama) is the conscious regulation of the breathing process and its main phases, inhalation, retention and exhalation.

5. Detachment (Pratyahaara) is the withdrawal of sense faculties from their objects.

6. Concentration (Dhaaranaa) is the focusing of the mind on a specific object such as certain places in the body.

7. Meditation (Dhyaana) is the prolonged, uninterrupted and undistracted focusing of the mind upon an object of concentration. The highest form of Meditation is that in which the mind is concentrated on the Supreme.

8. Inward Absorption (Samaadhi) is the merging of the mind in the object of contemplation to the complete exclusion of everything else. Absorption in the Supreme (Shiva-Samaadhi) is the highest form thereof and results in Enlightenment and the annihilation of all sorrows.

Such are the Eight Practices of Yoga which together are known as **Jnaana-Yoga (the Yoga of Knowledge)**. The term "Jnaana-Yoga" is sometimes erroneously confined to the practice of Spiritual Study (Svaadhyaya). In reality, however, it includes all Eight Practices (Yoga Ashtanga) described above.

Through the practice of Yoga Ashtanga the seeker acquires Yogic Sight (Yogipratyaksha) which is the direct perception of things without the interference of thoughts, emotions, beliefs and other such mental activities. Yogic Sight in turn results in **Higher Knowledge (Shuddha Vidya)** whereby the Soul knows things as they are in reality and is never again deceived by the delusions of ordinary experience.

The practice of Ashtanga Yoga, therefore, leads to the first stages of Enlightenment. Having harmonised his Actions and his Knowledge with those of the Universal Soul, the Yogi then proceeds to surrender to Divine Will and lives in complete Unity and Harmony with God. Thus, as we can see, the last stages of **Jnaana-Yoga** lead on to the first stages of the Yoga of Will-Power (Ichhaa-Yoga).

NOTE: The traditional **Ashtaanga Yoga** described here must not be confused with the "Ashtanga Yoga" of Pattabhi Jois which is a modern, western-inspired innovation. For the purpose of clarity the latter is also called "Ashtanga Viniyasa".

The Five Duties of Karma Yoga

Those who are unable to perform the Eightfold Practice may resort to the **Fivefold Duty (Pancha-Dharma)** or **Karma Yoga** which consists of the following observances:

1. Declaration of Faith (Shraddhaa): This consists in witnessing that "Shiva, the Supreme Principle of Goodness, is the Highest Truth and Yoga is the Path that leads to Him". By repeating these words, one enters upon the Path of Yoga. Thereafter, this may be done five times a day at sunrise, forenoon, midday, afternoon and sunset, or whenever possible, for the purpose of reinforcing one's resolve to keep to the right path and be an example to fellow humans.

2. Remembrance of the Holy Name (Smarana): Mental repetition of the mantra, **Om namah Shivaaya**, for a few minutes and at the same times of the day as the Declaration of Faith or at least mornings and evenings which are particularly auspicious times for communion with the Divine.

After the mantra, a brief prayer may be offered from the Scriptures or the sayings of the Prophets and Saints who are the Apostles of the True Eternal Faith (Sanaatana Dharma) and true leaders of the human race.

In Yoga, prayers may be performed in private by each person or, as far as possible, jointly. For example, family members may offer prayers together every morning and evening.

Communal prayers are especially beneficial for the purpose of strengthening the bond between members of the Community (Sangha) and cultivating a Spirit of Unity, solidarity and co-operation. Once a week, the whole Community may congregate for prayer in a Temple of God (Shiva Laya), in particular on the eighth and fifteenth of every lunar fortnight.

Thus the main holidays in the Spiritual Calendar are: the 8th (1st Quarter), 15th (Full Moon), 23rd (Last Quarter) and 30th (New Moon). Due to their link with the phases of the Moon and, by extension, with the natural rhythms of the Universe, these days are particularly suitable for Spiritual activities.

In those parts of the World where the True Faith is being suppressed, the faithful may meet in secret at the home of a Community member. If even this is impossible then the believers must commune with each other in their heart at an appointed time so that Shiva's Spirit of Unity is preserved, renewed and strengthened until the Day of Liberation has come.

3. Charity (Dayaa or Daana): Dayaa literally means Compassion which is an expression of Shiva's Infinite Love for His Creation. As such it has many aspects which all imply the capacity to give and do good (Daana, which evolved into Latin and English donate).

The practice of Charity opens our heart and helps us learn to see God in our fellow humans and allow Shiva's Spirit of Unity to become established in our midst.

In particular it is important to do good works for our families, for the Yoga Community and for the Holy Land of India which, as the Spiritual Home of all Souls, needs to be defended by all possible means against the evil intrigues of the Globalist forces.

In this context, it is especially meritorious for all right-believing people to provide all the moral, financial and material support to those who are engaged in the righteous struggle of liberation of the Holy Land from the anti-Spiritual forces which are holding her captive.

4. Fasting (Shiva Raatri Upavaasa): Fasting is the abstention from food on the fourteenth of every dark fortnight (the day before New Moon), in particular in the month of Maagha, on the annual **Mahaa Shivaraatri Festival**.

5. Pilgrimage (Yaatraa): At least once in a lifetime it is necessary to make a journey to the Holy Places of India such as Mount Kailasa, Pashupati Naatha Temple, Mount Arunaachala, Somanaatha Temple, Vaaraanasi (Kaashi) and Rishikesh. Those who are unable to travel to the Holy Land may visit the sacred places in their own country, for example Stonehenge in Britain and other such monuments of the Ancient Faith which is a branch of Shiva's Eternal World Vision of Universal Unity.

The purpose of observing the Fivefold Duty is to harmonise man's powers with those of the Supreme Being so that all negative effects resulting from dis-Harmony and dis-Unity with the Creator are removed and the Soul can enjoy a blissful existence in Unity with the Supreme.

God Himself is not inactive but performs the **Five Acts (Pancha Kartya)** of Creation, Preservation, Dissolution, Obscuration and Liberation. The human Soul, who wishes to elevate himself to higher stages

of experience must, therefore, become more God-like (Shiva-sama) and exercise his powers just as a young bird must exercise its wings in order to fly.

The practice of Karma Yoga causes the seeker to act more and more in unity with the Supreme Being's **Power of Action (Kriya Shakti)**. For this reason, Karma Yoga is also known as **Kriya Yoga**. Through the performance thereof man allows God's Spirit of Unity into his life whereby his entire existence is harmonised with the Spiritual Order of the Universe (Sanatana Dharma).

Thus, by the performance of the Five Duties man enters upon the Path of Yoga which is the Path of Unity with the Supreme. By the performance of the Eightfold Practice he advances upon the Path. And by means of the Yoga of Will-Power he arrives at his final Goal.

The three Stages of Yoga (Karma, Jnaana and Ichhaa) are collectively called **Hatha-Yoga**, the Path of Unity with the Supreme, where **Ha** and **Tha** stand for the Moonlight of the human Soul and the Sunlight of the Supreme Being, respectively.

Just as a child must harmonise his actions, thoughts and intentions with those of the adults in order to live in peace and harmony with human society, grown men must harmonise their actions, thoughts and intentions with those of God in order to live in peace and harmony with the Divine.

In the early portion of his life, the child must become an adult. In the next, man must become divine. In this way, complete Unity with the Creator is attained. Yoga is the process whereby this natural and necessary Unity of man and God is accomplished.

Yoga as Spiritual Purification

What is important to understand at this point is that mental and Spiritual cleanliness is as necessary as bodily cleanliness. In the same way as an unwashed body may accumulate impurities and become vulnerable to disease, unaddressed psychological issues may accumulate over the years and during many lifetimes to form a thick layer of mental refuse which covers the Soul and prevents the light of his Consciousness from radiating and illumining his life.

This is what is meant by **Mala** which literally means **Impurity** or **Dirt**. It is also the meaning of **Obstacle** or **Antaraya** (from "Antari", to come between, stand in one's way, separate). Yoga, therefore, is a Process of Cleansing and Purification which removes the crust of opacity from the Soul so that his inner light can shine again and he can clearly see where he is going.

In consequence, while **Ichhaa Yoga** serves the purpose of removing the Impurity of **Wrong Awareness** by cultivating the Will-Power to acquire the **Right Vision of Life (Sat-Darshana)**, **Jnaana Yoga** removes the Impurity of **Wrong Knowledge** and replaces it with **Right Knowledge (Sat-Jnaana)**. **Karma Yoga** removes the Impurity of **Wrong Action** and replaces it with **Right Conduct (Sat-Aachaara)**.

When the Impurity of **Wrong Action (Dur-Aachaara)** which is the outermost layer of Impurity has been removed through the performance of **Karma Yoga (consisting of the Five Duties)**, the Spiritual seeker is fit for the **Eightfold Practice of Jnaana Yoga (the Yoga of Knowledge)**.

When, by the practice of **Jnaana Yoga**, the seeker has rid himself of the **second layer of Impurity (Wrong Knowledge or Dur-Jnaana)**, then he is fit to enter the final stage of Yoga Practice (the Yoga of Will-Power) which removes the innermost Impurity of **Wrong Awareness (Dur-Darshana)**. At that stage, the will of man becomes identical with the Will of God which empowers him to have a Vision of Shiva's Eternal Truth of Universal Unity.

Thus Yoga which is the Glorious Path of Unity with the Supreme offers hope and Salvation to all, embracing all Souls in its Community of Universal Unity.

Yoga as a Unique Protective Force

In addition to its function of Spiritual purification and harmonisation or unification of the human Soul with the Supreme Being, Yoga also fulfils a protective function.

As a child finds security and safety in his father's protective arms, so also the human Soul finds refuge and shelter in Unity and Communion with God Who welcomes all the followers of Unity in His Infinite Embrace.

All forms of suffering such as illness, insanity and pain, occur as a result of dis-Harmony and dis-Unity with the Supreme Soul. By contrast, the more man lives and acts in harmony and unity with the Divine, the more he is protected by God's Infinite Power.

The stronger and deeper the bond of Unity with the Divine becomes, the more suffering is removed from the Yogi's life and he finally experiences uninterrupted Bliss. For this reason, in the Yoga Tradition, God is known as **Pashupati**, the **Lord and Protector** of all creatures, and right believers put themselves under His protection with the words, "Shri Shiva Sharanam mama", that is, "Lord Shiva is my Refuge".

Self-effort and Divine Will

What becomes evident is that progress in Spiritual life depends upon the amount of personal effort we put into our practice, whether we subscribe to the Yoga of Action, Knowledge or Will-power.

However, man cannot succeed in any endeavour without the Will of His Creator. Indeed, while man may temporarily have his own way in materialist and selfish pursuits, when it comes to Spiritual Advancement it is the Will of God that works in and through man for his own good.

In consequence, in the same way as Karma and the Will of God are responsible for the rise of obstacles, Karma and the Will of God are also responsible for their removal.

What is Grace?

The particular function of Divine Will whereby the Human Soul is elevated to a higher state of being, is called Grace (Prasaada or Anugraha). It is through the Grace of God that man is infused with the Spirit of Unity and is moved to start upon the Yoga Path of Unity with the Supreme.

While the Will of God is immutable and cannot be changed or influenced by man, those who desire to advance in Spiritual life must perform **Spiritual Karma** in the form of **Right Action (Sat-Aachaara)** which consists of Right Conduct and Spiritual Practice (Saadhana) so that the Obstructive Impurities (Tri-Mala) are removed from their Soul and their heart is rendered receptive to Divine Grace.

Thus **Self-effort** and **Divine Will** are the two causes responsible for the removal of all obstacles and Yoga is the means in which the two converge to make Liberation possible.

On a larger scale, Yoga or Spiritual Practice is the Worldwide Struggle to liberate Mankind from the anti-Spiritual forces of Globalism, Materialism and Extremist Beliefs which are the main obstacle to universal happiness, prosperity, unity and peace.